

The Standard Bearer

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Beholding the Things Done at the Cross

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

Luke 23:48-49

What a day to remember! Jesus' enemies had finally managed to kill Him.

How popular Jesus had been. For over three years he had taught as no man had ever taught. He had performed astounding miracles. Just this past Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey to the jubilant shouts of the multitudes that had come to celebrate the Passover. They acknowledged Jesus as the great son of David, the Christ of God, sent to establish the throne of David forever.

But now it was Friday, the day of the Passover. The

Sanhedrin had arrested Jesus and brought Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, for execution. Amazingly, the same crowds that had hailed Jesus as their king just days earlier were persuaded by their leaders to demand Jesus' crucifixion. Caving under the mounting pressure, Pilate ordered Jesus' execution.

The crowds that followed Jesus outside of Jerusalem to the place of execution witnessed many strange things that day. And when it was all done, they returned to Jerusalem smiting on their breasts. This is because God had spoken judgment against them through the strange events of that day.

But a few lingered at the scene of the crucifixion in shocked silence. These were His acquaintances, those who knew and loved Jesus. For them the crucifixion was a glorious victory that they did not as yet understand. But they certainly did understand the defeat of Jesus' enemies, and they were amazed.



Awesome spectacle!

Three unusual events took place during the six hours that Jesus hung from the cross.

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There was the darkness that descended upon the earth. Jesus had been nailed to the cross at 9:00 A.M. At noon a terrible darkness descended on the entire earth and lasted for three agonizing hours.

Then immediately upon Jesus' death at 3:00 P.M. two more very unusual things happened.

There was a mammoth earthquake that tore the countryside apart and laid open many graves that dotted the hills.

And then there was the rending of the temple veil. The two main rooms of the temple were divided by a large veil. At Jesus' death this veil was torn from the top to the bottom. This was no doubt witnessed by the priest offering incense at the evening sacrifice. And the report of this spread immediately throughout the city, even to the crowds at the cross.

These amazing events were signs through which God clearly spoke and revealed the significance of the cross.

We must understand that the cross did not belong to Jesus' enemies but to God. Yes, Jesus' enemies were using the cross to accomplish their devilish purpose of doing away with the Son of God. But God was simply using their evil deeds to accomplish His purpose to save His elect church. The cross belonged to God. After allowing Jesus' enemies time to vent their wrath on Him, God silenced them with His awesome works.

Through these mighty works God spoke.

He spoke through the three hours of darkness. Darkness in Scripture is a sign of God's judgment and punishment for sin. Hell, the place of God's wrath, is described as outer darkness. Through the darkness that descended on the cross, God revealed that He was pouring out the wrath of hell upon Jesus for the sins of His people.

God also spoke through the rending of the veil. The veil in the temple proclaimed throughout many centuries of the Old Testament that, because of sin, the way to God's presence was closed. By ripping the veil asunder,

God proclaimed that the way to Him was now open, because Jesus had taken away the sins of the people.

God also spoke through the devastating earthquake. Every earthquake is a sign of the final destruction of the world. Through the earthquake that shook the hills of Judea at Jesus' death, God proclaimed that the fruit of the cross would be the destruction of the present universe to make way for a new creation.



An overwhelming defeat!

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things that were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

A large company of people had followed Jesus to the place of execution. Because this was near a main highway into Jerusalem, many passersby also stopped to see the goings on.

The presence of the multitude is easily understood. This was no common execution. This was the crucifixion of Jesus, whom many had hailed as king. Besides

this, there was intense hatred for Jesus. Some had been His enemies throughout His entire public ministry. Others had turned against Him when He allowed Himself to be humiliated before Pilate, thereby making it clear that He was not the kind of king they sought. Their intense hatred became evident from the constant jeers and taunts hurled at Jesus as He

hung on the cross.

This hostile crowd now beheld the things that were done. With great amazement they witnessed the three hours of darkness, as well as the violent earthquake, with its devastation. And they heard the reports of the rending of the temple veil.

In small groups they returned to Jerusalem, smiting their breasts. Smiting upon one's breast was a sign of sorrow and mourning, even of alarm, fear, and anguish. All these emotions filled the hearts of those that slowly left the scene of the cross. And spontaneously they beat upon their breasts.

*We must understand
that the cross did not
belong to Jesus' enemies
but to God.*

This is because the crowds “beheld” the things that had just taken place. This means, not only that they closely observed what had happened, but also that they sensed the meaning of it all. They saw in the darkness that had descended upon them the sign of God’s wrath, wrath also upon them for what they had just done. They saw in the violent earthquake a picture of the destruction that awaited them for their sin. And by the rending of the temple veil they at least understood that the temple, which they honored so much, was of no more significance.

And they were filled with gloom and despair. They had gone to the cross with a sense of victory. They were about to destroy and rid themselves of someone whom they had all come in one degree or another to despise. But suddenly the cross had been taken out of their hands. Through strange and terrifying events God had proclaimed judgment and destruction upon them. It left them in fear and anxiety. With a sense of dread and mourning they slowly departed the scene of the cross smiting their breasts.



A stunned silence!

“And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.”

Jesus’ acquaintances were also at the scene of the cross. These were those known to Jesus intimately. Theirs were hearts filled with love rather than animosity for Jesus. They included His inner band of disciples. Did it include Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who buried Jesus? Special mention is made of the women that followed Him from Galilee.

After the crowds had slowly melted away from the place of Jesus’ execution, these acquaintances remained. They lingered, not wanting to leave. We are told that they stood afar off. Perhaps this was because the soldiers would not let them come close as they removed the bodies of Jesus and the two malefactors from their crosses. Perhaps they even lingered long after the body of Jesus was taken away by Joseph and Nicodemus for burial. They stood afar off to take it all in.

They stood in stunned silence.

They too had beheld the things that had taken place

that day. And they did not understand. Yes, they understood that judgment of God spoken that day upon Jesus’ enemies. But they did not as yet understand the purpose of Jesus’ crucifixion and the gospel of salvation that God had proclaimed through the terrifying events that accompanied it. This is evident from the fact that the women who stood afar off that day hastened to Jesus’ grave on Sunday morning to anoint His body.

But they would understand.

Soon they would behold even more amazing works of God. In a few days they would behold the empty grave of Jesus and the angel that spoke of His resurrection. Over the course of the next forty days they would behold the risen Lord ten different times, not only verifying the fact of the resurrection but also explaining its significance. At the end of this forty-day period, the eleven remaining disciples of Jesus would behold His ascension into heaven. And ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, they would behold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them.

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit they would understand!

Jesus was crucified to bear away the wrath of God against sin for the salvation of the church.

On the basis of that wonderful atonement, God would one day destroy this present creation, including His and their enemies. On its ruins God would erect a new heaven and earth, where His kingdom will be established forever in Jesus Christ. In that kingdom the people of God would have open access to the very presence of God through Jesus Christ

Beholding these glorious realities, the stunned silence of Jesus’ followers was changed to joyous confession. With joy and boldness they proclaimed the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They did so in spite of threats and persecution from Jesus’ enemies. Gladly they followed Jesus, bearing His cross.

And God graciously used this bold witness of His church to turn the hearts of many of Jesus’ enemies to Him to find salvation in His death and resurrection.

What a horrible thing to be the enemy of Jesus Christ. His enemies can do no more than to return home, smiting on their breasts in anguish.

What a blessing to be an acquaintance of Jesus Christ by faith. They have the joy of salvation in Him and the hope of eternal life. 

Controversy and Confusion over the Covenant: Is it not time to settle it? (4, concl.)

Almost 450 years ago, God used outstanding Reformation theologians like Bullinger, Calvin, Ursinus, and Olevianus to initiate the development of the doctrine of God's covenant of grace. Since then the work on this glorious doctrine has continued, but is far from finished. In fact, confusion and controversy mark the current status of this central doctrine. To Reformed believers, this ought to be intolerable. We should be crying out for a resolution.

Two possible ways were outlined in the previous editorial—ways in which the Reformed churches could seek to settle the controversies over the doctrine of the covenant. Perhaps some have other suggestions.

The burden of this editorial is this: If the Reformed churches do come together with this excellent goal, they ought to include the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. For this, I will make a case, and even a plea.

Why the PRCA?

The PRCA ought to be included in such a Reformed gathering, first, because she is part of the Reformed branch. Historically, many of our

members trace their lineage back to the cradle of the Reformed churches, the Netherlands. More importantly, all the members trace their spiritual lineage to the Reformed church in the Netherlands, most through the Secession (De Cock, Van Raalte, et al) or to the Doleantie of Abraham Kuyper's day. That is our heritage, and we have not forsaken it.

Secondly, with all faithful Reformed denominations worldwide, the PRCA maintain the Reformed confessions. The Heidelberg Catechism is faithfully preached Sunday after Sunday. Officebearers sign the form of subscription honestly, and they keep their vow to uphold all the doctrines and articles of the Reformed confessions, and reject all errors repugnant thereto. These confessions are not moldy documents gathering dust on the top shelf. They are not vitiated by revisions. All three confessions are part of the life of the churches, including catechism classes for our covenant youth.

I do not mean to imply that the Protestant Reformed Churches are higher or better than others in their commitment to the creeds. I express it simply because surely the minimum requirement for participation in any serious discussion on the covenant is: honest commitment to the Reformed confessions.

Which Confessions?

As an aside, the question might arise, which confessions should be honored? To put it differently, ought a deliberative body meeting for the purpose of setting forth the biblical doctrine of the covenant to include both Reformed churches *and* Presbyterian? In my judgment, yes, emphatically. As stated in the first editorial, the term "Reformed churches" includes all churches harking back to the great sixteenth-century Reformation—those churches, at least, that remain faithful to the truths of sovereign grace.

Personally, I would hope that a Reformed church (now in distinction from Presbyterian) would take the lead, simply because their theology has developed more consciously covenantally. The doctrine of the covenant is woven into the very fabric of the Reformed theology of the Netherlands.

However, that is not to say that Presbyterians have nothing to contribute or that they ought not contribute. They do, and they ought to. Numerous Presbyterian theologians have written works on the covenant of grace. Besides, the Westminster Confession contains explicit teaching on this doctrine, no less than a complete chapter.

But perhaps you wonder, can

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2011, p. 292.

Presbyterian churches and Reformed churches truly come together on the doctrine of the covenant, and affirm one doctrine in unity? I know that they can. The Protestant Reformed Churches in America and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Australia agree on the doctrine of God's everlasting covenant of grace. If this be possible between the PRCA and a Presbyterian denomination solidly committed to the Westminster Standards, surely it can be done more broadly among Reformed and Presbyterian churches that maintain their respective confessions.

But I digress.

The question is, why ought the PRCA be included in a discussion on the covenant?

In addition to what has been said, I contend, and do so in humility, that the PRCA have something to offer to the discussion. They have something positive. They have something constructive. And, again in humility, I maintain that they have something of value to bring into the discussion. I have five reasons for this assertion.

First, the doctrine of the covenant is precious to the PRC. Truly this doctrine is dear to our hearts. It is preached. It is discussed in public speeches and private conversations. And the covenant is lived—reflected in marriage, reflected in our schools, and reflected in the congregational life. God has put this love for His covenant into our hearts and lives.

Second, the doctrine of the covenant is tied to our very origin. Perhaps you were unaware of this. Most know that the PRC's origins

are connected with disputes over common grace and the well-meant gospel offer. Some eighty-five years ago, three ministers and their consistories were deposed for refusing to sign the "Three Points of Common Grace." Less well known is the fact that the leading theologians of the PRC—Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, and George M. Ophoff—were covenant theologians even in their days in the Christian Reformed Church.

Of special significance is that, already in the third volume of the *Standard Bearer*, Rev. Hoeksema began writing *Believers and their Seed* (articles on the covenant and the place of children in it). These articles opposed especially the views of Professor William Heyns of Calvin Theological Seminary. Hoeksema was setting forth the covenant doctrine that is in harmony with sovereign, particular grace, and in opposition to the covenant of Heyns, based on common grace. Thus, you can see that the doctrine of the covenant maintained in the PRC arose out of the very origin of the PRCA. It is imbedded in our history.

Third, the doctrine of the covenant became the defining doctrine of the PRCA. This doctrine became even more imbedded in Protestant Reformed history and theology through a lengthy controversy. This controversy started in the 1940s, and led to a grievous split in the denomination—a split over the doctrine of the covenant. It was unpleasant, painful, and very damaging to the denomination—no church would ever want to go through such

an ordeal. Yet, through it, a certain additional clarity emerged. Hundreds of *Standard Bearer* articles expanded on the doctrine. Protests and appeals had to be treated at the levels of consistory, classis, and synod—all on the covenant. Few denominations have paid such a heavy price for settling the doctrine of the covenant of grace. Over one-half the members left, over two-thirds of the ministers, and all the denominational funds departed.

But out of the bitter struggle emerged not only conviction concerning the covenant, but clarity of thought. Not only a love for the doctrine, but a profound appreciation for its importance.

Fourth, doctrinal development continued in the PRC. The battered, diminished churches survived the schism. Gradually she regained her strength. Preaching was not merely negative (against common grace), but positive, with a particular emphasis on the covenant. Solid, biblical sermons set forth, defined, and applied covenant theology. Ministers and professors led the way—writing articles in the *SB* as well as in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, delivering speeches, and penning pamphlets and books.¹

They were setting forth the doctrine of the covenant. They were developing its implications for home, church, and school, and especially the place of children in the covenant. This concentrated

¹ The interested reader can easily investigate this by searching the *Journal* at www.prc.org and viewing the books and past *SB* volumes at www.rfpa.org.

attention to the covenant continues to the present day—witness the articles on Bavinck’s covenant theology featured in the two previous *SBs*, a portion of an upcoming publication on the covenant.

Finally, the PRC ought to be included in the discussion because their covenant doctrine is, at the very least, within the bounds of Reformed theology. Not everyone in the Reformed camp will concur with the well-defined doctrine of God’s everlasting covenant of grace which is maintained in the PRC. I am well aware of that. However, none may honestly say that the covenant doctrine of the PRC is so radical that it is outside the bounds of Reformed covenant theology.

On the contrary, Herman Hoeksema developed his doctrine in close relation to that of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, especially the latter. It is a pity that Hoeksema in his *Reformed Dogmatics* did not state where he was explicitly agreeing with the covenant theology of Bavinck and/or Kuyper. He tells us where he differs with these theologians. But he does not much point out those areas of his covenant theology (the majority, in my estimation) that agree with these theological giants. Calvin did the same in his *Institutes*—pointing out serious differences that he had with theologians of the past, but not often pointing out with whom he was agreeing.

I am not criticizing Calvin and Hoeksema. Their intent was not mere historical theology, that is, simply stating what others taught. Rather, their intent was, first, to

show that their theology was 1) in harmony with the confessions, and 2) drawn from and based on the Bible. Second, Hoeksema was following exactly what he identified as the work of a dogmatician. His definition of “dogmatics” is significant.

Dogmatics is that theological discipline in which the dogmatician, in organic connection with the church of the past as well as in the present, purposes to elicit from the Scriptures the true knowledge of God, to set forth the same in systematic form, and, after comparison of the existing dogmas with Scripture, to bring the knowledge of God to a higher state of development.

Notice that a theologian works “in organic connection with the church of the past.” Hoeksema did that. He stood on the shoulders of Kuyper and Bavinck. And yet he knew that it was his duty to do more than merely repeat what they said. After evaluating and comparing their teaching with Scripture, he rejected what in their theology he was convinced was not in harmony with Scripture. Yet the foundation of their theology remained, and Hoeksema built on that, seeking to bring the knowledge of God’s covenant to a higher state of development.

But do not take my word for it. Read Herman Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics* on the covenant. Read Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* in the new English translation. You will be struck by the unity of thought and expression, the agreement that Hoeksema has with Bavinck.

That theology of Hoeksema is es-

entially the same as what is taught and preached in the PRCA today. The doctrine of the covenant has been, I believe, brought to a higher state of development since *Reformed Dogmatics* was published fifty years ago. But the point is, this doctrine is at the very heart of Reformed covenant theology—that of Kuyper and Bavinck.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have something to contribute.

The Protestant Reformed Churches would love to contribute. We have a zeal for the covenant, and a burning desire that the church, in organic connection with the church of the past and present, set forth the doctrine of the covenant that is both biblical and confessional.

Some are put off by the PRC. We might leave the impression that we think we are always right. Convinced, we are. Always right, we are not. A knowledgeable PRC member will be humbled by the fact that H.H. himself changed (was wrong on) his theology of God’s covenant with Adam before the fall, and on the significant matter of remarriage after divorce. We can learn. Only this we ask: Demonstrate from Scripture and the confessions when and where we err.

Some are put off by our perceived attitude. Pride, self-righteousness are condemnations laid at our collective feet. I respond with words sometimes published by Herman Hoeksema: “Nothing human is foreign to me.” Pride lives in every human heart. If we write in pride, God will, and in various lamentable ways, has, humble(d) us. At the

same time, do not mistake our zeal for the truth, for pride. And do not account all passion as pride. There can be a righteous anger against those *teachers* of theology who know, ought to know, the truth, but who rather lead the people astray! Surely Isaiah and Jeremiah were not guilty of pride or self-righteousness when they vehemently confronted the lie of the false prophets!

For all that, I again plead with the Reformed church world to settle the disputes. Reject the errors disseminated under the flag of federal theology. Define the covenant; spell

out the glorious doctrine of God's everlasting covenant of grace.

Whether this is done by serious discussion at ecumenical (Reformed) gatherings, or at a particular synod to which Reformed churches are invited to send delegations, or some other way, it must be done. For God's glory. For the protection of the sheep.

And if, by God's grace, this is attempted, then I plead, give the PRC a place at the table. Even if it be at the far end of the table.

May God grant it. 

Prayer of John Calvin after lecture on Ezekiel 17:

Grant, Almighty God, since thou hast deigned to enter into a perpetual and inviolable covenant with us which thou hast sanctioned by the blood of thine only-begotten Son, that we may faithfully stand to it; and may we be so obedient to thee unto the end, that we may experience thee a propitious Father to us, until we enjoy that eternal inheritance which thou hast prepared for us in heaven, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAS

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (12)

The Fundamental Elements of Postmillennial Eschatology (cont.)

Preterism (cont.)

The importance for postmillennialism of its preterist interpretation of Matthew 24:1-33 is that the apostolic doctrine of the last days elsewhere in New Testament Scripture depends upon Christ's teaching in Matthew 24. If the events foretold by Christ in Matthew 24 took place, not merely typically, but in full and final reality prior to or in AD 70, the same must be true of all such prophecies made by the apostles. All happened in the past, as concerns the church in the twenty-first century. And this is the conclusion that the postmillennialists draw from their preterist understanding of Matthew 24.

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Previous article in this series: January 15, 2011, p. 183.

The lawlessness of the last days predicted by the apostolic Scriptures refers to the "prevalence of Jewish lawlessness" prior to AD 70.¹

The apostasy, or falling away from the truth of the gospel, in the last days that is foretold in II Thessalonians 2:3 and many other places in the New Testament was the "political revolt" and "religious rebellion" of the Jews prior to AD 70.²

The New Testament warnings of the persecution of the church in the last days were fulfilled in the Jewish and Roman persecution of the early church before AD 70. Regarding the warning of persecution implicit in the prophecy of the "man of sin" in II Thessalonians 2:3, the realization was in the past, in the persecution of the early

¹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1994), 338-345.

² *Ibid.*, 334-338.

church by the Jews: “All of the lawless deeds of those priests who sent Jesus to His death and persecuted His bride, the church, had reached their climax by the time the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.”³ Concerning the “war with the saints” of the beast of Revelation (Rev. 13:5, 7), this refers to the persecution of the church by Emperor Caesar Nero—a persecution that was fulfilled before AD 70. “The Beast’s ‘war with the saints’ [was] the Neronic persecution.... This persecution finally ended with the death of Nero...[in] A.D. 68.” Indeed, *all* of the persecution of the church spoken of in the book of Revelation refers to the persecution by Nero—a persecution that ended prior to AD 70.⁴

According to the preterist postmillennialists, the “great tribulation” foretold by Jesus in Matthew 24:21 does not refer to the persecution of the church at all. Rather, it refers to the suffering of the Jews in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. “The so-called [by Jesus Christ in Matt. 24:21—DJE] Great Tribulation is long behind us, and...was Israel’s tribulation, not the church’s.”⁵ The postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists are simply following the lead of J. Marcellus Kik here: “Jesus is speaking [in Matt. 24:21—DJE] about a tribulation to be experienced only by the Jewish nation.”⁶

Antichrist likewise was a figure in the past. The “man of sin,” the “son of perdition,” whose revelation, according to II Thessalonians 2:2, 3, would immediately precede and signal the “day of Christ” was probably a first-century Jewish high priest.⁷ The beast from the sea of Revelation 13 was Caesar Nero: “The Emperor Nero Caesar is the Beast of Revelation specifically considered and...Rome is the Beast generically considered.”⁸ The Antichrist of Scripture was not these men, who lived and died prior to AD 70, only *typically*, but *in full and final reality*. No Antichrist looms for the church in the future.

³ Ibid., 334.

⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 47-56.

⁵ Gary North, “Publisher’s Preface,” in *ibid.*, xviii.

⁶ J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 117.

⁷ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 329-345.

⁸ Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 19; see also pp. 29-39, in which Gentry plays the numbers game with the letters in “Caesar Nero,” in Hebrew, to arrive at 666.

“Preterizing” the Book of Revelation

Since most of the book of Revelation predicts lawlessness, apostasy, Antichrist, and tribulation and since its eschatology must conform to the doctrine of the last things taught by Jesus in Matthew 24:1-33, most of Revelation too is explained by the postmillennialists as having happened in the past, prior to AD 70. David Chilton begins his bizarre commentary on Revelation with these words: “The Book of Revelation is primarily a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.”⁹ The conclusion to the commentary reminds us that “the Book of Revelation has a contemporary [that is, contemporary to those living shortly before AD 70—DJE] focus; it is not about the Second Coming... but about the inauguration of the New Covenant era during the Last Days—the period A.D. 30-70, from the Ascension of Christ to the fall of Jerusalem.”¹⁰

Contemporary postmillennialists are confident that they have successfully “preterized” Revelation 3-19. Everything prophesied in these chapters has already taken place. Nothing in these chapters is future to the church in the twenty-first century.

With regard to the book of Revelation, preterism now expands from hermeneutics (interpretation of Scripture) to New Testament introduction (the study of the nature, date, and place in the inspired body of Holy Scripture of the book of Revelation). If the book of Revelation is, in fact, prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the persecution of the church by the Roman emperor Nero prior to his death in AD 68, the date of its writing by the apostle John cannot be about AD 96, as the church has always believed. Obviously, if John wrote about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 96, he would have been lying when he wrote that the book is a “prophecy” (Rev. 1:3) of “things which must shortly come to pass” (Rev. 1:1). John would have been guilty of the deceit of predictive prophecy after the event.

Therefore, consistent with their preterist interpretation of the New Testament predictions of apostasy, Antichrist, and tribulation, the postmillennialists date the writing of the book of Revelation before AD 70.

⁹ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 582.

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. has devoted an entire, full-length book to proving that John wrote Revelation prior to AD 70.¹¹ Gentry's conclusion is that the apostle wrote Revelation "after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in late A.D. 64 and before the declaration of the Jewish War in early A.D. 67. A date in either A.D. 65 or early A.D. 66 would be most suitable."¹²

Extending Preterist Interpretation

The exegetical activity of giving a preterist interpretation to all the New Testament passages that speak of tribulation continues, and intensifies. Whereas Kik put Matthew 24:1-35 in the past, locating the beginning of Jesus' reference to His second coming at verse thirty-six of Matthew 24, postmillennialist Martin G. Selbrede extends the preterist interpretation of Jesus' eschatological discourse through verse thirty of Matthew 25. In the odd language of postmillennial preterism, Selbrede declares that we must "preterize the entire chapter [Matthew 24] and half of the next chapter as well."¹³ What this means is that everything in all of Matthew 24 and in Matthew 25:1-30 refers exclusively to events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and was fulfilled in that ancient history. Christ begins to speak of His bodily coming in the future and of events connected with that coming only at Matthew 25:31, with the prophecy of the final judgment.

No New Testament passage that predicts apostasy, conflict for the church, impending cataclysm, or the nearness of the coming of Christ escapes the preterist exegesis. In addition to Matthew 24:1-25:30 (and the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21) and almost the entire book of Revelation, Matthew 10:22; Matthew 16:27, 28; Matthew 26:64; John 21:21, 22; Romans 8:18; Romans 13:11, 12; Romans 16:20; I Corinthians 7:31; I Corinthians 10:11; Philippians 4:5; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:7-9; I Peter 4:7; I John 2:18; II Timothy 3; Titus 2:13, and many more pas-

¹¹ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (San Francisco: Christian Universities Press, 1997).

¹² *Ibid.*, 336.

¹³ Martin G. Selbrede, "Reconstructing Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* 15 (Winter, 1998): 185.

sages are explained as having been fulfilled in the past, at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Despite the difficulty of verse nine (how does one account for the Lord's longsuffering with a view to the repenting of all His own in the short period between AD 30 and AD 70?), Martin Selbrede entertains the hope that some "clever preterist" will yet explain even II Peter 3 as having been fulfilled in the past and, therefore, as not referring to the second coming of Christ and the end of the world at all.¹⁴ The zealous postmillennialist is not only open to the notion, but also eager for its validation, that "the promise of his coming" (II Pet. 3:4); "the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (II Pet. 3:7); "the day of the Lord" (II Pet. 3:10); the burning up of the earth and all the works in it (II Pet. 3:10); "the coming of the day of God" (II Pet. 3:12); and the "new heavens and a new earth" (II Pet. 3:13), happened, *in reality and finally*, in AD 70.

It follows that for Martin Selbrede and his fellow Christian Reconstruction postmillennialists the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 is the reason why they are "diligent...[to be] found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Pet. 3:14); why they "account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (II Pet. 3:15); and why they beware lest they be led away with the error of the wicked (II Pet. 3:17).

On this preterist explanation of II Peter 3, those to whom Peter wrote were looking for the new heavens and new earth that would come into existence immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (II Pet. 3:13), and evidently found them. Whatever we Christians in the twenty-first century should be looking for, it is not new heavens and a new earth, for the new heavens and new earth of II Peter 3:13 came into existence in AD 70.

So rigorous, so iron-clad, is the preterist explanation of the New Testament passages prophesying tribulation for the church that the ("partial") preterism of Christian Reconstruction asserts that the "last days" themselves are past. Whereas the Christian church has always supposed that the "last days," which began with the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, stretch out, and in a special way have reference, to the time immediately preceding the second, bodily coming of Christ,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 196, 197.

preterism teaches that the “last days” are past. “The Biblical expression *Last Days* properly refers to the period from the Advent of Christ until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 16.

Preterism, specifically *partial* preterism, thus, annihilates (future) eschatology. “Eschatology” means and refers to the ‘last things’ that happen in the last days. But according to preterism, there is no future “eschatology.” The last days with their last things are past. They ended in AD 70. 

Establishing Reformed Churches (2)

In mission work, Reformed churches seek to establish churches that are Reformed. This involves (as we noted last time) striving to establish churches that are Reformed both in history and doctrine. These are foundational. Churches need to be established that are solidly grounded in the historic Reformed faith, as summarized and set forth in the Reformed creeds.

But while history and doctrine are essential, they are, contrary to the opinion of many, not enough.

Some, when being taught the Reformed faith, have the idea that they stand as it were before a buffet table from which they may select just those foods they like. They may choose the chicken and rice, but skip the potatoes and fruit. When it comes to the Reformed faith, they think they are free to select simply what they please. And often they choose only the doctrines (at least certain, more palatable ones), and leave the rest. They imagine that being Reformed in doctrine is enough.

The truth is that the Reformed faith is all encompassing. When it takes hold of a believer and a church, the changes are radical and sweeping. Every area of a person’s or a church’s life is affected and altered. For that reason, a truly Reformed church is Reformed, not only in history and doctrine, but also in at least three other respects.

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That brings us to the third characteristic of a church that is Reformed. In addition to being so in history and doctrine, she is also Reformed in worship. She follows in the footsteps of the reformers, who rejected the false worship of Rome and returned to true, biblical worship.

To be Reformed in worship means especially three things.

First of all, in Reformed worship God, and not man, is central. The people of God do not gather in worship to acknowledge and praise a man (whether a great preacher, an outstanding singer, or a sports hero). Nor do God’s people assemble in order to bow before and pray to a mere human (whether a pope, a priest, or a saint). Nor do believers come together to hear what a certain man is going to say to them (whether a missionary, a politician, or an ex-alcoholic). But God is the focus. The worship honors and glorifies Him. The Reformed church confesses: “Not unto us, O Lord of heav’n, But unto Thee be glory giv’n” (Ps. 115:1, Psalter #308).

God is the focus throughout the worship service: in the prayers, the preaching, the singing, and every element of worship. God’s Word is read; not the writings of men. God’s Word is preached; not the ideas of philosophy or science or politics. And God’s Word is sung. Reformed churches sing the Psalms in worship, and not the hymns and praise-songs of men.

Secondly, the church that is Reformed in worship

abides by the Regulative Principle of worship. God is worshiped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

God is sovereign, not only in salvation, but also in the matter of worship. He commands, in His Word, how He is to be worshiped. Thus the Regulative Principle: only those things may be included in worship that are commanded in the Bible. What is not commanded is forbidden.

Reformed believers do not worship God according to their personal preferences. They do not decide what to include in or exclude from worship on the basis of what they consider to be more interesting, more exciting, or more effective. The Reformed church includes in worship only what the Bible says it should. Not choirs. Not dancing. Not films. Not movies. Not special numbers. Not testimonials. But prayer, Scripture reading, confession of faith, offerings, congregational singing (of the Psalms), the invocation and blessing, and preaching.

Thirdly, Reformed worship is characterized by the primacy and centrality of preaching. This is evident in Reformed churches in especially two ways.

It is reflected first of all in the church's architecture. The pulpit in Reformed churches is not off to the side. It is not supplanted by an altar (as in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches). It is not replaced by choirs, or drums, or bands (as in Pentecostal, and now increasingly also in many nominal Reformed churches with their progressive worship). Rather, the pulpit is placed and kept in the front and center. For the central element of worship is the sounding forth of the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

That preaching is central is also evident in the fact that the sermon takes up the major part of the worship service. The sermon is not a minor element. The minister is not told, on account of everything else that has to take place (special music, testimonials, children's activities), that he has only ten to fifteen minutes for his message. Rather, the sermon is lengthy. And it consists of a thorough exposition and biblical application of the Word of God. The focal point is always the preaching of the gospel.

In order to be a truly Reformed church, a congregation must embrace, not only sound doctrine, but also biblical, Reformed worship.



The fourth characteristic of a truly Reformed church is that she and her members are Reformed in life. Again, the Reformation is significant. For under the direction of the Spirit, the Reformation restored godly living over against the terrible immorality of Rome.

A church that confesses Reformed truth is not truly Reformed if the truth is not lived. Doctrine and life go together. God's Word is not just for our heads, but also for our hearts. And if it is for our hearts, it is also for our lives. For a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth that which is good (Luke 6:45). Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth (and life) speaks (Matt. 12:34).

It is possible for someone to know the truth very well, intellectually. But if Reformed doctrine is merely an intellectual enterprise, it will have no effect. So, what if one knows the truth, but it makes no difference in his life? It will do him no good—not in this life, and not with regard to eternity.

When, however, the truths of God's Word are truly loved and believed, they work their way through into the lives of God's people. Godly living "becomes (fits, matches, harmonizes with) sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1). The life of the Christian is one that is consistent with the truths and doctrines he believes and confesses.

The Reformed church therefore upholds the law of God. She confesses that our sovereign God has the right to put demands on our lives. The fact that the Reformed faith denies salvation by obedience to the law does not mean the law is done away with. The ten commandments still stand. They reveal sin. They point us to Christ. They are the guide for a thankful, Christian life.

A Reformed church, therefore, is not antinomian. She does not say: "You are saved by grace, so it doesn't matter how you live." Nor does she say (cf. Rom. 6:1): "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound!" To such ideas she says: "God forbid!" She requires obedience and godliness of her members. For she confesses that we are saved by grace "unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). And these are done out of thankfulness for what God has done. The law and all the demands of God's Word are preached.

The Reformed church preaches, for example, the keeping of the Sabbath day. Some today claim that this was simply an Old Testament ordinance. Others, knowing

that is not the case, nevertheless seek to justify being involved in activities that are inappropriate for the Lord's Day (such as work, buying and selling, vacation travel). But the Reformed church is bold to require that God's people keep the Sabbath day holy. The members are admonished not to go their own ways, not to find their own pleasures, and not to speak their own words on God's day (Is. 58:13). They are directed, according to the Scriptures, to call and view the Sabbath a delight—not a burden.

This is just one example of the fact that Reformed churches teach and require obedience to God's law. They know that God wills to have the ten commandments "strictly preached" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 44).

In close connection with this, the Reformed church upholds one of the important marks of the true church of Christ: Christian discipline (Belgic Confession, Article 29). Through Christ-appointed officebearers, she exer-

cises biblical discipline over any who err either in doctrine or life. She does this lovingly, with the prayer that Christ would be pleased to work repentance and salvation.

In light of all we have said, we may add that the members of a Reformed church should be easily recognizable as those who strive to live antithetical lives in this world. Theirs is a life of spiritual separation from the ungodly world (II Cor. 6:14-17). They, as the covenant friends of God, are not friends of the ungodly (II Chron. 19:2). They do not love the world and the things of the world (I John 2:15), but they love the Lord their God and the things of His eternal kingdom.

Reformed living—that too is a fundamental characteristic of a Reformed church.



One more characteristic of a truly Reformed church remains. We will consider this, Lord willing, next time.



The Nature of the Office of Elder (3)

Christ's Rule Through the *Body* of Elders

Having established in our first article that the office of elder in the church is the office of rule, and having explained in our second article that this rule is that of Jesus Christ, the King of the church, we now emphasize that Christ rules the church through the elders as a *body*.

The Body of Elders

To say that Christ rules the church through the elders as a body is to say that Christ rules through the consistory. By the term "consistory," Reformed churches

refer to the ruling body of an instituted congregation, which body is made up of all the elders and ministers of that congregation.¹ In Presbyterian churches, the equivalent of the consistory is the "session."

Not only do both terms refer to the elders as a body, but each in its own way also connotes the idea of rule. A "session" is the sitting of an organized body, to do its official work. Christ, the church's King, holds session at the right hand of God throughout the whole New Testament—He sits there to rule. Likewise, the Presbyterian "session" refers to a church body that sits to

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¹ Remember that in Scripture the minister is considered an elder. Evidence of this is that I Timothy 5:17 explicitly speaks of two kinds of elders in the church. Besides, I Timothy 3 lists God's qualifications for both bishops and deacons. Are there in Scripture no qualifications for ministers? Yes; they also are bishops.

rule. Our English word “consistory” is derived from the Latin noun *consistorium*, which is itself derived from the Latin verb *consistere*. The verb means “to stand together”; a *consistorium* was originally a waiting room in which people stood; from this it came to refer to the room in which a secular or imperial council met; and it has long been applied also to a church council.

The point we are making is that through this body of elders in the church, Christ rules.

Christ does not rule the church through any one man, or any elder, in isolation from the rest. Think of the consequences of supposing that each elder and minister can himself rule the church: the body of elders would become a theater for a power struggle; the church’s government would quickly degenerate into chaos; and the rule of Christ in the church would not be manifest as it should be.

Rather, Christ rules through the body of elders as they meet, deliberate matters pertaining to the spiritual welfare of the congregation, and make decisions regarding that spiritual welfare. For this reason, Article 37 of the Church Order of Dordt (1618-1619) originally read, “In every congregation there shall be a consistory consisting of ministers of the Word and elders, who shall meet at least every week...”² Many Reformed denominations, including the Protestant Reformed Churches, have revised this article to fit their own needs; but they have not omitted the fundamental requirement that the church have a ruling body.

Christ rules the church through the body of elders as it makes decisions by majority vote. From a practical viewpoint, a majority vote is necessary simply because two or more men do not always agree on all matters. More importantly, to decide matters in the consistory by majority vote is to recognize that Christ gives each elder equal authority; no one officebearer has more spiritual authority to rule than does another. Majority vote (regardless of how the vote was taken) is what led the first New Testament church council whose proceedings are recorded in Scripture to make its decision: various

² Richard R. DeRidder, *Translation of ECCLESIASTIAL MANUAL including the decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other significant matters relating to the government of the churches* (P. Biesterveld and Dr. H. H. Kuyper, authors) (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), page 167.

men spoke to the issue before James finally spoke, giving the direction that was adopted. Scripture explicitly notes that “the apostles and elders, with the whole church” were “pleased” to implement his ideas (Acts 15:22). Although Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt specifically applies to the decisions of the *major* church assemblies (classis and synod), it applies to the consistory as well: “... that which is decided by majority vote shall be considered settled and binding unless it is proved to conflict with the Word of God or with” the Church Order.³

That Christ rules through majority vote of His appointed elders is not to say that Christ is pleased with every decision that elders make by majority vote. It is possible that a majority of elders, or the elders as a body, make unwise decisions. Bearing this in mind, Article 31 of the Church Order safeguards the right of an individual member of the congregation to demonstrate that the decision of the consistory conflicts with Scripture or the Church Order, by appealing to classis, then to synod.

One sees, especially in the decisions made by elders and broader assemblies of apostate or apostatizing churches, that Christ is not pleased with many decisions made by majority vote. However, the decisions made by majority vote of those elders who serve in a *faithful* church, and who are themselves *godly* men, who do their work carefully and realize that they rule in behalf of Christ, will be pleasing to Christ almost without exception. Through such He rules.



That Christ rules through the body has implications for the individual members of the church, and for how the elders do their work in the congregation.

Ordinarily the consistories do well to delegate at least two elders to carry out any mandates that regard the spiritual lives of the people. Not only does this provide two witnesses to the consistory regarding what was done on the visit and how the visitors were received, but this also helps the congregation see that Christ rules through the body.

By this I do not suggest that any member of the congregation may refuse to meet with an elder who comes individually. Christ functions through His officebearers, as they bring His Word. Therefore, when an elder or

³ DeRidder, p. 166.

pastor, without mandate from the consistory, meets individually with a fellow brother or sister in Christ, and brings the Word of God to bear directly on his or her trial or sin or other situation of life, Christ works through that man individually.

But if the individual member must meet with any elder who comes individually, all the more must he meet with, and submit to the judgment of, the body of elders as a whole. Through them, in faithful churches, Christ rules His people.

Plurality of Elders

To have a body of elders is to have more than one elder in any congregation.⁴

The Church Order of Dordt, and the revision of that Church Order as officially adopted by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, requires that there be more than one elder in any congregation. It does so, first, by consistently speaking of elders in the plural. The unmistakable implication is that every congregation must have at least two elders.

Second, because to have two elders would be to have a plurality but not a large number, and because to have two elders allows for the consistory to be deadlocked on an issue, the Church Order requires the adding of the deacons to the consistory where there are few elders. Article 38 of Dordt's Church Order required this "where the number of elders is very small."⁵ Even though the Synod said nothing more than "very small," yet this means at least two, for the word "elders" is plural. Article 37 of the Church Order of the PRC specifies: "This [adding deacons to the consistory, DJK] shall invariably be the rule where the number [of elders, DJK] is less than three."⁶

Third, the Church Order gives explicit instruction what to do if "no consistory can be constituted"—that

⁴ One could pursue the subject of the plurality of elders in more detail by reading Chapter 2, "Shared Leadership," in Alexander Strauch's book *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995). The entire book is recommended reading for anyone who wants to read a biblical study of the office of elder.

⁵ DeRidder, p. 167.

⁶ *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches, 2005), p. 391.

is, if not enough elders can be found to rule a church. In such instance, this group of believers "shall be placed under the care of a neighboring consistory." The point is that the ruling body of any congregation must consist of more than one elder; and if it consists of only two elders, the deacons must be added to the consistory.

Having a plurality of elders in every congregation has biblical warrant. When the Old Testament refers to the ruling body of a city, it always refers to them as "elders," in the plural. We may use this as biblical warrant to have a plurality of elders in the church in the New Testament, because the elders of Israel were to judge God's people in light of God's law.

Concluding their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). Paul left Titus in Crete to "ordain elders in every city" (Tit. 1:5). The apostle addressed his epistle to the Philippians "to all the saints,...with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

Although no Scripture passage explicitly commands every congregation to have a plurality of elders in it, passages such as these indicate that this is God's intent. This biblical "warrant" amounts to God's requirement for the churches of Christ in the New Testament.



This requirement of Reformed and Presbyterian churches that the ruling body consist of a plurality of elders distinguishes our form of church government from other forms.

No hierarchical system of church government, such as one finds in the Romish church, Anglicanism, and Episcopalianism, does justice to the principle of a plurality of elders. These have their "bishops," who are in reality the overseers and rulers of the church; but these are not comprised of a plurality of men within a given congregation, ruling in that congregation. And, as is well known, the rule in Rome is ultimately by one man, the pope, who claims to be the current-day apostle and representative of Jesus Christ as King of the church.

Nor does the congregational form of church government, such as one finds in Baptist and other independent churches, do justice to this principle. Often in such churches one finds one pastor who is in effect the only elder. A plurality of deacons do assist him in his work.

But the office of ruling elder, in distinction from that of teaching elder, is absent. In many of these churches, the church is as strong or weak as the pastor himself.

The Erastian form of church government, often found in the Reformed and Lutheran churches shortly after the Reformation, according to which the civil government rules all aspects of the church, does not do justice to this principle of plurality of elders, for the office of elder is nonexistent in the church.

As regards seeing the rule of Christ in His church through a plurality of men called to rule as a body, Reformed and Presbyterian churches alone have a proper form of church government.



Having a plurality of elders is beneficial for the elders themselves, as well as for the whole congregation.

Clearly, a plurality of elders lightens the workload of any individual elder.

A plurality of elders means that the men can pool their wisdom and their individual gifts, for the good of the whole.

A plurality of elders makes it more likely that various and diverse needs of the congregation will be met. One or two men either might not see certain needs, or be willing to address those needs.

The elders themselves are accountable to the body, where there is plurality. In cases where one man rules, that one man often considers himself above rule.

In addition, the members of the congregation will have more than one man to whom they can go, if need be, for spiritual support and encouragement.

But the chief benefit of plurality is that it shows to the congregation, and enables the elders themselves to keep in mind, that no one man rules the congregation. The King and Ruler of the church is Jesus Christ. He is pleased to institute an office in His church on earth, which office is filled with earthly humans, to carry out that rule. But the rule is Christ's.

This the congregation sees better, both when a plurality of men rule, and when those men rule in the humble awareness that they are to be guided and limited in their rule by God's Word, and when they seek God's glory.



To Go or Not to Go?

Is that the question? May that be the question? Ought that to be the question?

Will you go to the Young People's meeting? Will you go to their outing? Will you help with the fundraiser?

There are many reasons to say yes. It is pleasing to the Lord. It will benefit you and your church, strengthening your fellowship and communion. Going to Bible study will increase your knowledge of God's Word. Good causes will prosper with your participation, together with the participation of others in the group.

There are all kinds of reasons to say no. You will need to sacrifice, give of yourself. You may not be

pleased with the way things are run. You can think of things you would rather do. You don't need to go. You are not required to participate. Your parents might only sigh, but they will not rebuke you or punish you if you do not go.

What will you do?

But have you ever thought beyond the question? Have you ever thought about what you are saying or thinking by even considering going or not going? Should you be asking the question at all? Should you even be having the debate?

The question to go or not to go can be a temptation. The temptation comes when those questions become a way of finding reasons not to participate. You are asked the question. Does that mean that you have the right to refuse? You are only exercising your right to say No. You

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can think of someone else who can go, someone else who might do a better job, someone else who is more willing. You can think of all kinds of things you would rather do. So you scrape together your reasons, and on their basis you do not go.

You do this not once, not twice, but several times. It becomes a habit, so much so that perhaps no one asks you anymore. Any possibility of saying Yes and of participating becomes more and more remote.

Satan loves to see the young people of the church of Jesus Christ in that way, for it is his way.

What is Satan's plan? He wants you to say No often, so that it brings you closer and closer to refusing what God requires in His Word. Your foe will begin with things that are optional, the things that you can turn down without causing a fuss or trouble for yourself. But he will keep pushing, working to get you to refuse more and more. Then you will find yourself right at boundaries clearly laid out in Scripture. But if the devil has gotten you that far, it will be difficult to recognize those boundaries. By that time, admonitions of your parents and even fellow young people will sound only faintly in your ears. His ultimate goal is that you begin saying No to God's Word, where it *clearly* lays out your duty. Satan wants you to say No to the commandments of Scripture. He wants you to say No to making confession of faith. He wants you to say No to regular church attendance.

Another goal Satan has is to separate you from the church. Over there are the young people of the church. There they have their meetings. But you are not there among them. There they go, doing this, doing that. But you are not found among them. Separate from them, you become an easier target for the Satan's wiles. He turns your mind to see your fellow young saints in a bad light. You begin to justify your separation by scorning them, perhaps calling them hypocrites. You think evil of them because they stop asking you, maybe accusing them of hating you. The devil also knows that, separated from the people with whom you belong, it is easier to push you toward worldly companions. You start running with a different crowd. Before you know it, you are far from your fellow young people, far from the church, and in the embrace of the world.

How do you avoid those temptations? Learn to say, "Yes, I will go." "Yes, I will do it." But then go further.

Put aside the question, "Will I go?" and learn to answer, "Of course I am going!" Not go to the meeting? Who would think such a thing! Not help out? I wouldn't dream of that!

Scripture addresses your participation in a number of ways. Think of the difference between laziness and diligence that Scripture addresses in Proverbs 10:4; 12:11, 24; 13:4, 11. Diligence extends to far more than what God's Word explicitly requires. Diligence is part of the wisdom to lay hold on opportunities that are set before you. That diligence certainly applies to your spiritual relations to your fellow saints.

Second, Scripture calls you directly to consider seriously your place in the body of Christ. I Corinthians 12:25 especially demonstrates that it is according to the very nature of the church as a body that the members take care for one another. Ephesians 4:16 shows that your love (constant, committed care) is the way that the body of Christ is strengthened by the truth of God's Word. You show that love in the way of your participation, of saying Yes.

Third, you have all the examples of saints that placed themselves at God's disposal. Think of Abraham saying to the Lord, "Behold, here I am" (Gen. 22:1). Think of Samuel saying, "Speak, for thy servant heareth" (I Sam. 3:10). Think of David, still a youth, identified by God as "a man after God's own heart" (I Sam. 13:14). Can you imagine Abraham, Samuel, or David saying No to the Lord? You would hardly dare bring the question, "Should I go?" Of course you will go! God calls you to take your place, to do your part, without hesitation.

That you are a steward of God in His kingdom also touches on your involvement in and commitment to the church. That stewardship is first outward. He has given you your place in the group for the service of your fellow young people in that group. He has given you work to do in that group. Some of that work benefits the group. Some of it benefits those outside the group, with whom the group works. Will you go and do the work the Lord has for you in that group? Will you stand in the place He has set up for you? Of course!

That stewardship is also inward. The Lord has given you gifts and abilities to use in His service. He has given you your mind and will and your strength of heart and soul. He has given you particular abilities and gifts, abilities and gifts

that He has not given to others. God has given you these gifts for you to use and exercise in His service.

The outward stewardship God has given you is supplied by your inward stewardship. Those outward opportunities that the Lord has given you He calls you to meet and fill with your strength, your talents and abilities. The whole group, or those served by the group, profits from your gifts and abilities.

When you look at your participation as a stewardship you see that your Yes is a Yes to God. It is a calling from God, and your place in it aims straight upward to God's kingdom. Your participation lays up treasure in heaven. Your obligation becomes splendid and glorious, carrying its profit in things eternal.

But you also profit in this life from your participation. There are two ways in which you profit. First, channels and lines will be built up between you and the other members of your group. Along those channels

you will not only give, but you will also receive. You will be blessed simply by being in fellowship with others. You will be encouraged. There are also times when you will be able to be admonished, and you will be able to take that admonition well because of the strong relationships that you enjoy with your fellow saints.

The other way in which you will profit is that your spiritual strength will grow, and your abilities to use the talents that God has given you will grow. You will grow in motivation. Your desire to contribute will grow. You will find it easier to say Yes and more enjoyable and rewarding to follow through.

Your participation will be a sign of your spiritual health and strength, and with your continued participation you can expect to grow stronger, healthier, and more mature.

Will you go?

Of course! 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought, by David Van Drunen. Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. 466 pages. Softcover. ISBN978802864437. Reviewed by Mark H. Hoeksema.

David Van Drunen is Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California. As is evident from this and other of his writings, he stands in the conservative tradition of Reformed and Presbyterian theology, and is therefore a voice that needs to be heard.

When I was assigned this book for review, its title intrigued me because of the questions it raised in my mind: What is natural law, what are the two kingdoms, and what is their sociological relation to one another? While possibly an oversimplification, the question is: What is the nature of the kingdom of God, and what is our relation to it as we live in the world?

Van Drunen's thesis is that the Reformed church has historically held to the concepts both of natural law and of two kingdoms of God in the development of its

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social thought, and he explains these terms. By "social" or "society" he means "the common life that people live together in their various economic, political, and legal (etc.) relations" (p. 3). In speaking of two kingdoms, he means that God rules the church (the spiritual kingdom) as redeemer in Jesus Christ, while he rules the state and all other social institutions (the civil kingdom) as creator and sustainer (p. 1). These two kingdoms "have significantly different ends, functions, and modes of operation" (p. 1). Natural law is the "belief that God has inscribed his moral law on the heart of every person, such that through the testimony of conscience all human beings have knowledge of their basic moral obligations and, in particular, have a universally accessible standard for the development of civil law" (p. 1). He asserts that classic Reformed theology "interconnects natural law and the two kingdoms doctrine, particularly in looking to natural law as the primary moral standard for life in the civil kingdom" (pp. 1, 2). The Christian, then, is a citizen of "two distinct kingdoms, both of which are ordained of God and under his law, yet exist for different purposes, have different functions, and operate according to different rules" (p. 13).

The author mentions that it is his intention in the fu-

ture to offer a detailed defense of the natural law/two kingdoms paradigm. Although he is a bit oblique on this point, it seems apparent from his use of the word “defense,” as well as from various comments throughout the book, that he refers to the one-kingdom doctrine of the neo-Calvinists and to their attack on traditional Reformed theology. His stated purpose for writing this volume is to trace the development of the natural law/two kingdoms doctrine in Reformed thought, showing that Reformed thinkers grounded social life in God’s work of creation and providence, not in his work of redemption (pp. 14–15). He is wisely and carefully laying a historical foundation for future argumentation. To use a colloquialism, he is getting his ducks in a row before he begins shooting.

Van Drunen accomplishes his purpose admirably. He shows that Reformed theologians did not invent the natural law/two kingdoms doctrine, but built upon the foundation of early church fathers and medieval thinkers, including Augustine, Aquinas, Scotus, Luther, and others. He explains Calvin’s position, as well as that of post-Reformation theologians such as Turretin and Cotton. He then turns to the history of this doctrine in northern Europe and America, paying special attention to Thornwell and Abraham Kuyper. He moves on to more recent figures such as Barth, Dooyeweerd, and Van Til, and then draws some conclusions from his study.

It is important to remember that this book is a *history*, not a polemic. Nevertheless, every historian necessarily and understandably writes from a certain bias. This is true also of Van Drunen, who is clearly a defender of the traditional Reformed view and an opponent of neo-Calvinism, though in this book he is only mildly adversarial. Yet he is quite objective in his writing, pointing out that the traditional view sometimes lacks consistency and coherence, and that it does not always answer all of the hard questions involved in the current controversy regarding the nature of the kingdom.

Van Drunen’s book is by no means an easy read. Yet it is an excellent contribution to the understanding of the nature of the kingdom. His writing is complex, yet clear. It is very scholarly, in the sense that he furnishes thorough documentation by means of abundant footnotes. From his stated historical perspective, he has

masterfully written a definitive history of the truths in question. This book is highly recommended. In fact, it is, from two viewpoints, mandatory reading for seminary professors and students, ministers, and all those who are interested in the subject of the kingdom of Christ.

First, it lays the historical groundwork for further discussion of the nature of God’s kingdom in the context of the teachings of the neo-Calvinists, who assert that they stand in the tradition of the Reformation in their adherence to a one-kingdom teaching from a redemptive and eschatological perspective. Is there only one kingdom, or are there two kingdoms? If there are two, does natural law define the civil kingdom? If so, what is the correct understanding of natural law and what is the relation of natural law to the kingdom? If there is only one kingdom, what is its nature, and how does it square with the traditional Reformed view of two kingdoms as demonstrated by Van Drunen? Is the one-kingdom idea a heresy, or is it in whole or in part a valid interpretation of historical Reformed and confessional thought?

Second, and more importantly, this book is valuable to the PRCA in that it contributes to our understanding of the nature of God’s kingdom. At the present time it is apparent that we face the issue of the kingdom in the broader context of neo-Calvinism vs. the traditional two-kingdom idea, a controversy concerning which we ought to make our voice heard. But more importantly, we in the PRCA are internally engaged in a discussion of the nature and definition of the kingdom, precipitated by the views of the neo-Calvinists. Some among us assert that the church and the kingdom are identical. Others, myself included, view the kingdom as a broader and more inclusive concept than that of church, in keeping (I believe) with Van Drunen’s historical analysis.

Perhaps this book will help us to sort out some of the complex issues involved in the concept “kingdom.” As we attempt to do so, a caveat is in order: Although it is always important that we be biblically and confessionally correct, opposing all heresy and standing for the truth, this is not a salvific issue. We should therefore not approach this subject from an adversarial perspective, though we may well have differences of opinion, but in a cooperative spirit of understanding for the sake of the positive development of the truth. ☞

Ideas Have Consequences: The Cult of Charles Darwin (1)

“And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.”

1 Chronicles 12: 32

The creation/evolution *debate* has been lost—by the proponents of evolution, that is. Unfortunately, for the evolutionist at least, his god has betrayed him! The evolutionist’s god, SCIENCE, was supposed to confirm what its chief prophet, Charles Darwin, prophesied in the evolutionist’s bible: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. Instead, it appears that Darwin’s prophecies have been undercut by the very god (science) that was supposed to prove his theory. The advances of modern science *challenge*, rather than support, his godless theory! If Charles were alive today, he would need to eat his words and concede defeat. It’s just too bad his disciples can’t see it. Or maybe they simply refuse to do so.

On the other hand, in all likelihood they do see it and are simply being true to form as presented in Romans 1:25, where the evolutionist fits the mold of one, “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator....” This would explain, no doubt, an interesting development in the evolution/creation discussion: a development that is seen in the increasing reluctance of evolution’s chief present-day proponent, Richard Dawkins, and others, to *debate* the issue with those who hold to creation and/or intelligent design. Instead

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of using discussion/debate to prove evolution right and their opponents wrong from science, various methods are being used in an attempt to silence the skeptics of evolutionary science. When one has lost the debate, it is time to concede defeat or silence the opponent. It appears that many of Darwin’s apologists have chosen the latter approach. In this article and one to follow we will examine concerns of some evolutionists with Darwin’s theory, some adaptations they have made to his theory, methods they are using to silence the skeptics, and some of the serious consequences that follow.

The Gospel According to Charles

A few original prophecies from the chief prophet of evolution will serve to make it clear why some of Darwin’s contemporaries tended to distance themselves from him just a bit. Read for example Darwin’s *Epistle of the Bear* (made-up title, ck).

In North America the black bear was seen by Hearn swimming for hours with widely open mouth, thus catching, like a whale, insects in the water. Even in so extreme a case as this, if the supply of insects were constant, and if better adapted competitors did not already exist in the country, I can see no difficulty in a race of bears being rendered, by natural selection, more and more aquatic in their structure and habits, with larger and larger mouths, till a creature was produced as monstrous as a whale.¹

If you think that was fantastic, try some of Darwin’s *Revelations of the Giraffe* (made-up title, ck).

So under nature with the nascent giraffe, the individuals which were the highest browsers, and were able during dearths to reach even an inch or two above the others,

¹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859), ch. 6.

will often have been preserved.... By this process long-continued...combined no doubt in a most important manner with the inherited effects of increased use of parts, it seems to me almost certain that any ordinary hoofed quadruped might be converted into a giraffe.²

In response to evolution stories like this, one creationist remarked: "A frog turning instantaneously into a prince is called a fairy tale, but if you add a few million years, its called evolutionary science." With stories like these, who needs Rudyard Kipling? On second thought, could it be that Darwin was Kipling's inspiration for his *Just So Stories*?

All kidding aside, all of Darwin's disciples were not amused. In fact Professor Richard Owen of the British Museum convinced Darwin to leave the whale-bear story out of later editions of *The Origin of Species*. While Darwin conceded to this, word has it that he privately regretted giving in to his critics. Years later he still thought the example "quite reasonable."³ And while the bear story is a whale of a tale, it would later become evident that his giraffe exposition, if true, would result in the extinction of the giraffe, since the female giraffe is on average 24 inches shorter than the male.

As the saying goes, "the devil is in the details." And the details of *The Origin of the Species* not only reveal numerous "just so stories" like those presented above, but also a litany of conjecture, speculation, and even expressed ignorance on the part of Darwin. A few examples from *The Origin of Species* will illustrate the point (emphasis, ck):

- So it has *probably* been with the turnspit dog... (p. 42).
- Some, *perhaps* a great, effect *may be attributed* to the increased use or disuse of parts (p. 53).
- So profound is *our ignorance*, and so high *our presumption*, that we marvel when we hear of the extinction of an organic being (p. 81).
- It is good thus *to try in imagination* to give any one species an advantage over another (p. 85).
- In order to make clear how, *as I believe*, natural selection acts, I must beg permission to *give one or two imaginary illustrations* (p. 97).
- Some of them [challenges to Darwin's ideas, ck] are

² Charles Darwin, ch. 7.

³ Vance Farrell, *The Evolution Handbook* (Altamont, TN: Evolution Facts, Inc. 2001), 850.

so serious that to this day I can hardly reflect on them without being in some degree staggered; but, *to the best of my judgment*, the greater number are only apparent, and those that are real are not fatal to theory (p. 1).

● To the question why we do not find rich fossiliferous deposits belonging to these *assumed earliest periods* prior to the Cambrian system, I can give no satisfactory answer (p. 345).

● The theory of natural selection, even if we look no further than this, *seems* to be in the highest degree *probable* (p. 487).⁴

Adaptations to the Gospel According to Darwin

As a consequence of these uncertainties and other difficulties with "The Gospel According to Charles," W. R. Thompson, when asked to write an introduction for a new printing of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, wrote in part:

Modern Darwinian paleontologists are obliged, just like their predecessors and like Darwin, to water down the facts with subsidiary hypotheses, which, however plausible, are in the nature of things unverifiable...and the reader is left with the feeling that if the data do not support the theory they really ought to.... This situation, where scientific men rally to the defense of a doctrine they are unable to defend scientifically, much less demonstrate with scientific rigor, attempting to maintain its credit with the public by the suppression of criticism and the elimination of difficulties, is abnormal and undesirable in science.⁵

Clearly Thompson recognized that much of what Darwin wrote in *The Origin of Species* is "doctrine," not science. This problem and numerous developments in the study of genetics and DNA have led many other supporters of Darwin's theory to move in the direction of promoting what came to be known as neo-Darwinism (sometimes referred to as the Synthesis, or just Darwinism).

A brief explanation of the ideas of neo-Darwinism compared to those of Darwin might be helpful here. Darwin promoted the theory of common descent and

⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species, The Harvard Classics*. Ed. Charles W. Eliot, (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation 1937), 42, 53, 81, 85, 97, 169, 345, 487.

⁵ Farrell, 864.

evolution by *natural selection* (sometimes called “survival of the fittest”). Over time, this would result in descendants with slight variations of their ancestors’ features. When looking at the work of the animal breeders of his day and seeing the valued results achieved in the breeding process, Darwin speculated that a similar process happens over long periods of time in nature *without* the help of man. Eventually this would result in new characteristics emerging in the various species and ultimately even the development of new species. According to Darwin, this process, which he called natural selection, is the driving force behind evolution.

A contemporary of Darwin, Gregory Mendel, made some discoveries in the field of genetics that suggested that evolution involves the transmission of characteristics from parent to child by means of *genetic transfer*. Over time, Mendel’s work in the area of genetics developed to the point that supporters of Darwin’s theory of evolution were confronted with a problem: who is right, Darwin or Mendel? Is evolution a result of natural selection, or of genetic transfer? Thus what is known as neo-Darwinism was developed as an attempt to reconcile these discoveries in genetics with Darwin’s theory of natural selection. While all neo-Darwinists are not in total agreement on these, it would appear that most hold to the following three basic ideas:

- the primacy of natural selection as the creative agent of evolutionary change.
- gradualism (accumulation of small genetic changes).
- the extrapolation of microevolutionary processes (changes within species) to macroevolutionary trends (changes above the species level, such as the origin of new designs and broad patterns in history). Evolutionary change is a shift of the frequency of genes in a population, and macroevolutionary trends come from gradual accumulation of small genetic changes.⁶

Darwinian Defectors

However, this paradigm has not proven satisfactory for many evolutionists. Some of their reasons for distancing themselves from it are revealing. Listen to a few of them:

⁶ <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Neo-Darwinism>.

Richard Goldschmidt writes:

The evolution of the animal and plant worlds is considered...to be fact for which no further proof is needed. But in spite of nearly a century of work... there is no unanimity in regard to the details of the means of evolution.... The facts fail to give any information regarding the origin of actual species, not to mention the higher categories.

Ambrose Flemming, president, British Association for Advancement in Science, says:

Evolution is baseless and quite incredible.

L.L. Cohen writes:

It is not the duty of science to defend the theory of evolution, and stick by it to the bitter end, no matter which illogical and unsupported conclusions it offers.... Let’s cut the umbilical cord that tied us down to Darwin for such a long time. It is choking us and holding us back.

George G. Simpson, leading evolutionist writer of the mid-twentieth century, says:

It is time to give up trying to find a mechanism for evolutionary origins or change.

Albert Fleischmann, zoologist, writes:

The theory of evolution suffers from grave defects, which are more and more apparent as time advances. It can no longer square with practical scientific knowledge.... It is purely a product of imagination.⁷

Antony Flew, leading evolutionist best known for his books arguing against the existence of God and for atheistic principles, had a change of heart in 2004. Research on DNA and what he believed to be inconsistencies in the Darwinian account of evolution had forced him to reconsider his views. DNA research, he said:

has shown, by almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved.⁸

So, why can’t all Darwinists see what these men have seen? Darwin himself (were he alive today, and honest) would in all likelihood join his defectors, especially Antony Flew. After all, Darwin wrote: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”⁹

⁷ Farrell 260-266.

⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/17/arts/17flew.html>

⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (6th ed., London: John Murray, 1959)182.

By means of modern science these complexities have now come to light.

Does this mean that the theory of evolution is dead? Sadly, that is not the case! However, it does mean that to a significant degree the debate/discussion has changed. While there continue to be attempts to de-

fend evolution with science, Dawkins and others have taken a more dogmatic approach. In our next installment we will address that and the consequences of these ideas for Western society in general and for modern-day Israel in particular.

... to be concluded. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI recently informed their congregation that they are now a member of the conservative website, sermonaudio.com. The committee uploads sermons to this website, which can be downloaded to any computer in the world. You will find a link to this website on Southwest's home page: southwestprc.org.

The Evangelism Committee of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA gave a brief presentation on sermonaudio.com during lunch after Calvary's Bible Study on March 17. The congregation was invited to come to learn how to use or better utilize this website in their personal evangelism efforts.

The Kalamazoo, MI PRC hosted a Spring Lecture on March 18 at their church. Their pastor, Rev. M. De Vries, spoke on the topic, "O How Love I Thy Law." This lecture helped explain the relevance and purpose of the law for those under grace, the relationship between law and grace, and the meaning of being under grace, and not under law. After the lecture there were refreshments and a question and answer period.

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Consistory of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI approved a proposal from their India Committee for a visit to the Reformed Fellowship in Vellore, India and Paul Raj, from March 10-22. Rev. C. Haak and Elder B. Jabaay, along with their wives, made the trip. Every other week a group that includes Rev. Haak, Rev. Woudenberg, and Rev. Kortering, visits with Paul Raj via Skype, giving instruction in the Reformed faith. The purpose of this face-to-face meeting was to assess the work of the mission and orphanage, give assistance in training future officebearers for the church, and help clarify the goals of Georgetown's work with the believers there.

Sister-Church Activities

At the request of our denomination's Contact Committee, and with the approval of the Council of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI, Revs. Mc Geown and Stewart of the Limerick Ref. Fellowship and the Covenant PRC respectively, made a weeklong visit to Portugal, March 7-11. Their first speaking engagement was a mini-conference in the Barreiro Igreja Crista Presbiteriana do Portugal (ICPP) on March 8. Rev. Mc Geown spoke on "Sin, Man's Problem," followed by Rev. Stewart speaking on "Sovereign Grace, God's Solution," based on Ephesians 2. Three evening lectures were also given at Portuguese

Assembly of God churches in and around Lisbon: "God's Magnifying His Word"—Rev. Stewart, in Barreico; "What Does It Mean to be Born Again?"—Rev. Mc Geown in Caseras; and "Grace not Works"—Rev. Stewart, in Lisbon.

Young People's Activities

The young people of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI enjoyed their third annual overnight retreat on Friday evening, March 18. This year, their pastor, Rev. A. Lanning, spoke to them on Proverbs 4:26: "Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." After that, the young people had discussion groups on that topic. This retreat has been called "Friends Night Out" all three years, with Faith's young people encouraged to invite friends from other churches. It seems they take this responsibility seriously, with this year's total attendance around 80 young people. After discussion ends, the young people spend the rest of the overnight enjoying mixer games, dodgeball, basketball, and volleyball tournaments, pool tables, foosball, board games, and March Madness basketball for those who really care. They enjoy pizza and ice cream, pop and water, and cinnamon rolls and juice. All in all, the committee reports they eat a lot of food. This year's retreat was

Standard Bearer

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held at Harderwyk Ministries, by Harderwyk CPR in Holland, MI. The building is specifically for young people, and is equipped with a gym, kitchen, and meeting rooms.

The Young People's Society of the Randolph, WI PRC invited their congregation to lunch on Saturday, March 19. Soup and sandwiches were served from 11A.M.-2P.M., with cupcakes for dessert rounding out the menu.

The young people of the Crete, IL PRC enjoyed a Saturday afternoon at Xtreme Trampoline on March 12.

Mission Activities

A delegation of two elders, Ron Kuiper and Dick Kuiper, and two deacons, Steve Kamps and Scott Kooienga, from the Southwest PRC, made a visit to Pittsburgh, PA and

the Fellowship there, the weekend of March 13, doing the work of oversight on behalf of Southwest's Council of our denomination's mission and missionary, Rev. Bruinsma. The delegates expected to do family visitation with two families and one individual of the mission, meet with Rev. Bruinsma and the Steering Committee, hear a confession of faith, and exercise oversight of the Lord's Supper on Sunday.

In news from the Mission in the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, we can report that the book *Doctrine According to Godliness*, by Rev. R. Hanko, has now been translated into Tagalog. Elder Rod Bongat and Brother Jun Villegas worked together on this project. They hope to have it published and available for sale soon.

School Activities

The PRCS/HCHS Spring Promotional Dinner was held March 11 at the Crete, IL PRC. This year's annual dinner was special in that it celebrated the 50th and 10th anniversaries of the Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, IN (formerly of South Holland, IL) and Heritage Christian High School. A cordial invitation was extended to all past alumni to attend.

Minister Activities

Rev. A. Lanning, of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, declined the call he received to serve as pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI.

Rev. M. Vander Wal, serving the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, accepted the call to serve as pastor of the Wingham, ON, PRC. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

New Book

■ Crete and Faith Protestant Reformed Evangelism committees have helped publish a NEW book/pamphlet called ***The Work of the Holy Spirit*** written by David J. Engelsma and Herman Hanko. Please contact one of these churches for more information or to receive a copy.

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2011 at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Faith PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Elizabeth Katerberg and family in the passing away of her husband,

MR. JOSEPH KATERBERG.

May she and the family place their hope and trust in the Lord Jesus, who said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27, 28).

Rev. Andrew Lanning, President
Richard Flikkema, Clerk