

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Anticipating the New Heavens and Earth REV. RON VAN OVERLOOP	434
<i>Editorial</i>	The Manhattan Declaration— A Document of Ongoing Controversy REV. KENNETH KOOLE	436
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (8) PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	440
<i>All Around Us</i>	“Largely a Matter of Terms” REV. NATHAN LANGERAK	442
<i>God’s Wonderful Works</i>	The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth (7) REV. JAMES LANING	446
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	Royal Children—Delighting in Our Father’s World MRS. JAN MIERSMA	447
<i>Believing and Confessing</i>	The Gospel of the Mediator REV. RODNEY KLEYN	451
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	453

Anticipating the New Heavens and Earth

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

II Peter 3:13, 14

Peter was being used of God to encourage new Christians in their faith. He had been emphasizing and explaining that Jesus is coming again to judge. Jesus' return is the hope of the Christian. In his first letter Peter declared that we are regenerated unto this hope, for an inheritance is reserved in heaven for us—a salvation that will be revealed in the last time (I Pet. 1:3-5). But while Christians are yet on this earth, they will experience heaviness because of a multitude of trials, which try their faith so that it might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:6,7).

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In this chapter of his second letter, Peter has been saying that the return of the Lord means the great destruction of the present heavens and earth (II Pet. 3:10-12). But he quickly goes on to say that the destruction of the present world means the creation of new heavens and a new earth. The old will pass away. And then God will make all things new.

The ultimate goal and vision of the Christian is the new creation, which will abide forever. Our hope is not the kingdom of God on earth. God sets before His people the promise of a new and wonderful creation when Jesus comes again. This is our hope. And for this we are to look with eager anticipation!



God promises that there will be “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” The present “heavens shall pass away..., the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (10). This destruction will not be annihilation, i.e., a complete passing away. There will be a restitution of all things (Acts 3:21);

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and like a coat that gets old, they shall be changed (Ps. 102:26). Just as the destruction of the first world with the flood resulted in a new world by change and not by being created out of nothing (II Pet. 3:6, 7), so the old will be changed into new. God will create the new heavens and earth out of the ashes of the present world.

Be aware that this denies that an evolutionary development of things will continue forever. And this denies the expectation of a glorious kingdom on this earth.

The word “new” can mean a renewing or a reviving in the sense of bringing to greater life. When Paul writes about the believer being a “new creature” in Christ, so that all things are become new, this implies a radical change in inner life and character, but not such a change that the result is something unrecognizable. The form and substance of the new creation will be similar. God uses the same words (heaven and earth) to describe the first (Gen. 1:1) and the glorious final (Rev. 1:1). The new is likened to the first when it is spoken of as “Eden” (Is. 51:3), with a tree of life (Rev. 2:7; 22:2). There will be similarity, but the glory and the richness of life in the new heavens and earth will be so much greater that it will be a tremendous change. For example, there will be no more night (Is. 60:19, 20), and no more sea, creating divisions and separations (Rev. 21:1).

Also, the new heavens and earth will not be under a curse anymore. The new world will be purged and purified from all the effects of sin. The whole of creation was made subject to vanity because of man’s fall into sin (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:20). As a result, creation groans, waiting to be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21-23). Creation is said to anticipate this deliverance as a pregnant woman waits to be delivered. It is as if the new world is hidden within the present world, waiting to be evidenced when the present is destroyed. In the new heavens and earth there will be no curse, but only blessing. There will be peace and harmony within all of creation (Is. 11:6-9).

Another way to speak of it is to say that the new creation will be the old refined—just as the “now” world was refined in the flood of the “then” world (5-7). The day of

Jesus’ coming will be “like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Mal. 3:2, 3), not a destructive fire. Just as God delivered the “then” world from all the wicked, leaving only believing Noah and his family, so the fire at the time of Jesus’ return will deliver creation from all the reprobate and from the kingdom of the Man of Sin, leaving only the resurrected elect.

This idea is supported by the fact that the book of Revelation gives brief accounts of heaven that make us think of the book of Genesis. Instead of the heavenly luminaries, the glory of God will light the City. Paradise will be regained. Man will not be hiding from God, but will be dwelling with God in perfect communion. Instead of being prevented from the Tree of life, man will be eating of it.

Our text adds, “wherein dwelleth righteousness.” Righteousness is being right in God’s sight. God is righteous, for He is perfectly good. God created Adam good, with original righteousness. But after the fall of mankind into sin there is none righteous, no not one (Ps. 14:3; Rom. 3:10). The holy God, who sees and knows all, declares that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom. 3:20). Hence the present world lies under the curse of God because of man’s sin. But in the new heavens and earth there will be only righteousness. There will be no unrighteousness there. Only those made righteous by the obedience of Christ (and declared to be so by God Himself only on the basis of Jesus’ perfect saving

work) are the inhabitants of the new creation. And in the new world the righteous will no more do any unrighteousness. All of the elect (confer v. 9) will be there.

We will be free from this body of death, which bears the effects of the curse of sin, and in which we only sin. No more will we have to spend prayer time confessing sin and asking for forgiveness. We will only be praising the Lord.

In the glory of the new heavens and earth wherein is

*Look for the
new heavens and earth!
Let the knowledge
of its coming
have an effect on
how you are living now.*

only righteousness, we will dwell with God (Rev. 21:3). The covenant relationship of friendship and fellowship between God and His people will be consummated. Whereas now we have times of some warm communion with God, then we will live in it continuously. Now we have times when our hearts are spiritually cold, but then nothing will keep us from intimate fellowship with God. There we will know only the joy of walking close with God, not cumbered with any weakness or worldly care. Now we have many times when we forget God and thus willingly sin against Him. In this present world we are often unaware of or confused about Scripture's truths. Also in the intermediate state (after death, when only our soul is experiencing glory) we will have limitations: not yet will we have our bodies; not yet will all the members of the church be present; not yet will we have the explanations of the judgment day. That is why these souls of saints anticipate and pray for vengeance and for the fullness of glory also. But in the new heavens and earth we will be freed from every limitation and weakness. Then we will be able to give full expression to our joy all the time.

Then everything will be peace and a sense of being at home. Redemption in Jesus makes us to receive the adoption of sons, so we are a part of God's family. We will be like Him (even like His most glorious body) in the family of God.




God would have His children "look for," that is, anticipate eagerly, this new creation. This is our living hope (I Pet. 1:3-7).

Our hope has an effect, namely, godliness in life. Hope is a beautiful, living thing. And it is efficacious. Anyone who hopes for the new heavens and earth will aspire to it—and this aspiring will evidence itself in an optimistic anticipation. So true is this effect that it can be said that one who remains living unrepentantly in filthy sins has little or no thoughts for the kingdom of God in the new heavens and earth.

This is what is meant by: we are diligent to be found of God "in peace, without spot and blameless." Instead of being focused on and totally engaged by this world and the things of this world, we look for the new heavens and earth. We learn that real integrity (blamelessness) consists of being approved of in God's judgment—not what finds the praise of men.

How can we, who still fight against so many of our own sins, be found blameless by God? Only in Christ. Only because of Christ.

Let us "be diligent that we may be found of him in peace." This peace is a peace of conscience, because it is rooted in enduring help. Focus on the peace Christ made for us with God by the blood of His cross, when He reconciled us to God by His death and resurrection. Be diligent to enjoy the peace of conscience that He gives. This peace is a quietness of soul because it rests on Christ, His blood, righteousness, and atonement.

Look for the new heavens and earth! Anticipate it with great joy! Let the knowledge of its coming have an effect on how you are living now. What manner of persons ought ye to be?! 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

The Manhattan Declaration— A Document of Ongoing Controversy

Although the document named above has received previous attention in the pages of the *SB* (cf. Jan. 15, 2010, p. 175, Rev. C. Spronk), due to recent

developments we have decided it is worth a couple more articles and further analysis.

The document (drawn up in the fall of 2009) is worth some further atten-

tion if for no other reason than the stir it has been creating in Evangelical circles. Its signing by a long list of leading names has caused some ripples to course through the Evan-

gelical community, ripples severe enough to cause some fracturing, if not realignment, of old alliances. There is division amongst long-time Evangelical allies about the propriety of signing this Declaration due to two things, first, the looming presence of Rome amongst those who signed the document, and second (more importantly for its severest critics), the wording of the document itself—wording carefully crafted to allow for the broadest possible coalition of ‘Christians.’

However, the document is worth some extra attention for more reasons than the division it is causing in Evangelical circles. It deserves our attention also because it addresses what is of present concern to every one of us, namely, the issue that is commonly referred to as “the present cultural wars.”

It is a document (declaration) drawn up by three well-known names—Charles Colson (of prison ministry renown), Dr. Timothy George (of Beeson Divinity School), and Dr. Robert George (of Princeton University and a leading Roman Catholic intellectual). The declaration was drawn up in the interests of forging a unity of purpose amongst all ‘Christian communities’ and, in time, to serve as a basis for united action against the growing evil that today threatens everything moral and Christian, which evil is being more and more identified with our own government and its elected officials.

And who can deny that we live in a society that openly expresses an increasingly anti-Christian bias and antagonism, which spirit is showing

itself in increasingly aggressive measures against every law and practice that can be traced to any Christian, biblical source.

In response to this real and present danger has come this Manhattan Declaration (so named because it was formulated in Manhattan, of New York City). The rationale behind the

*...the question is,
“Sounding the alarm
with whom?”
And another
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“Worded how?”
Which is to say
nothing of,
“And urging
what actions?”*

document, with its call to Christians of every cloak and caliber to sign their names to this document (with men having name recognition called to lead the way), is the old motto “United we stand, divided we (will) fall!”

From every human point of view, we understand the allure of the document and its call to solidarity of all professing Christians. We live in days when there is coming into clear focus what one twentieth-century author of Christian renown called *That Hideous Strength*. There is an anti-Christian spirit that shows itself with increasing clarity in high places and governs more and more all new legislation and laws.

And if there is not a united action across Christendom against a common enemy, how can we hope to accomplish anything against so powerful and relentless a foe?

The question is not whether those who drew up the document are correct in their assessment of what is taking a stranglehold on the whole of our Western, post-Christian world, nor whether such spreading evil is not reason for alarm and even for sounding the alarm.

Rather, the question is, “Sounding the alarm with whom?” And another would be, “Worded how?” Which is to say nothing of, “And urging what actions?”

We do well to get a summation of the document before us. One of the best we came across is found on the website www.challies.com (whether designed by the co-authors of the Declaration or some other source, we are unable to determine).

Christians, when they have lived up to the highest ideals of their faith, have defended the weak and vulnerable and worked tirelessly to protect and strengthen vital institutions of civil society, beginning with the family.

We are Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians who have united at this hour to reaffirm fundamental truths about justice and the common good, and to call upon our fellow citizens, believers and non-believers alike, to join us in defending them. These truths are:

1. the sanctity of human life
2. the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife

3. the rights of conscience and religious liberty.

Inasmuch as these truths are foundational to human dignity and the well-being of society, they are inviolable and non-negotiable. Because they are increasingly under assault from powerful forces in our culture, we are compelled today to speak out forcefully in their defense, and to commit ourselves to honoring them fully no matter what pressures are brought upon us and our institutions to abandon or compromise them. We make this commitment not as partisans of any political group but as followers of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Note the three items ('truths') mentioned—the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage, and the rights of religious liberty. Following a Preamble and then a page of introduction, the Declaration spends some seven pages setting forth these truths as being essential for the well-being of natural life and human happiness. As indicated, the intention of the Declaration is that by signing it the signatories make public declaration to our present society and Government that for themselves these truths are non-negotiable items when it comes to honoring the State and obeying its edicts in these areas.

In the interest of getting the flavor of the document itself, it is worth our while to quote part of it before we offer some analysis. The following quotation is the main part of its introduction. (Those who would like to read the whole docu-

ment can find it online under www.manhattandeclaration.org).

We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians, have gathered, beginning in New York on September 28, 2009, to make the following declaration, which we sign as individuals, not on behalf of our organizations, but speaking to and from our communities. We act together in obedience to the one true God, the triune God of holiness and love, who has laid total claim on our lives and by that claim calls us with believers in all ages and all nations to seek and defend the good of all who bear his image. We set forth this declaration in light of the truth that is grounded in Holy Scripture, in natural human reason (which is itself, in our view, the gift of a beneficent God), and in the very nature of the human person. We call upon all people of goodwill, believers and non-believers alike, to consider carefully and reflect critically on the issues we here address as we, with St. Paul, commend this appeal to everyone's conscience in the sight of God....

Because the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage as a union of husband and wife, and the freedom of conscience and religion are foundational principles of justice and the common good, we are compelled by our Christian faith to speak and act in their defense. In this declaration we affirm: 1) the profound, inherent, and equal dignity of every human being as a creature fashioned in the very image of God, possessing inherent rights of equal dignity and life; 2) marriage as a conjugal union of man and woman, ordained by God from the creation, and historically understood by believers and non-believers alike, to be the most basic institution in society and; 3) religious liberty, which is grounded in the character

of God, the example of Christ, and the inherent freedom and dignity of human beings created in the divine image.

We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences to affirm our right—and, more importantly, to embrace our obligation—to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season. May God help us not to fail in that duty.

Note especially the opening words, "*We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians* (emphasis ours—kk), have gathered...to make the following declaration." Words that speak of a broad ecumenicity. The same idea is found a couple of paragraphs later, "We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences...." And then this telling remark, "We pledge to each other, *and to our fellow believers* (emphasis ours—kk), that no power on earth...will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence."

That phrase "our fellow believers," which includes, then, Roman Catholics that sign (and really Mormons too, if they want to add their signatures), carries a freight of implications of course!

The list of names found amongst the original 152 signatories is a veritable who's who in Evangelical circles today—names such as Dr. J.

I. Packer, Dr. Cornelius Plantinga (President of Calvin Seminary), Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III, Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (President, Southern Baptist Seminary), Dr. James Dobson, Rev. Jonathan Falwell, Dr. Wayne Gruden, Josh McDowell, Rev. Tim Keller, and Joel Belz and Marvin Olasky (Editors of *World Magazine*), to name a few of those most familiar to us.

This is not to say that all the Evangelicals have gotten on board. Some prominent names that declined the invitation are Drs. Alistair Begg, Michael Horton, John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, and James White. So great was the pressure to sign, however, that several felt compelled to write statements why in good conscience they could not do so.

A brief overview of their explanations for declining to sign the Declaration can wait until next time.

For our present purposes it is worth noting that there has been enough criticism directed at those who did sign, that a number of them have felt compelled to justify their having done so.

Their basic defense is that the document is not an ecumenical document at all, along the lines of the controversial documents drawn up by the ECT coalition (Evangelicals and Catholics Together), but merely an expression of solidarity amongst individuals who as professing Christians are and ought to be aligned against the same evils loose in our culture.

Representing such an explanation is Dr. Ligon Duncan, president of the Alliance of Confessing

Evangelicals. The following quote gives the heart of his justification for those of the Alliance who did sign, in contrast to those who refused.

Commenting first on those who refused, Duncan states:

Those who did not sign the document believe that it is a lamentable example of the confused sort of ecumenical theology, on display in the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) statements, and that it implicitly commits its signers to acknowledge a commonality between Evangelicals, Roman Catholics and Orthodox on the gospel, who is a true Christian and what is a true church....

Then comes the justification for those who signed.

Those who did sign the document believe that it is a statement of solidarity, not of ecumenism [!], and that it represents the kind of principled co-belligerency advocated by, for instance, Francis Schaeffer and James Boice. These signers believe that document actually helps clarify their concerns with the whole ECT project, because the Manhattan Declaration only asks Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox to agree on matters on which we actually agree (marriage and sexuality, the sanctity of life, and religious liberty), rather than purporting an agreement in vital matters on which we do not agree (the Gospel, what is a Christian, what is a true Church).

It should be made clear that those Council members who did not sign the document agree with what the document says about the social issues it addresses. Their


concern is that the document implies an agreement between Evangelicals and Catholics on the Gospel where there is in fact not an agreement....

[Therefore], [t]he issue boils down to a matter of judgment, not a disagreement in principle, between those Council members who signed and didn't sign. The non-signers believe that the content of the document and the associations of the primary authors imply an ECT-like confusion about the Gospel. The signers believe that the explicit assertions and emphasis of the documents relate only to areas of principled social-ethical agreement between Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. Further, they believe that it is important for individuals from the major quadrants of the historic Christian tradition to speak on these pressing matters in solidarity.

So Dr. Duncan seeks to set the lines of disagreement. The evidence is that he rightly assesses the difference of perspective between the men who signed and those who did not.

The question is, however, does this assessment of the document and what it attempts to do and what, in the judgment of its critics, it fails to do, go deep enough?

The evidence is that it does not. A penetrating analysis of what (*who!*) lurks behind the document comes from the pen of Richard Bennett, a former Roman Catholic priest, whose name has been mentioned in the *SB* before in connection with ecumenical documents drawn up by men of the ECT.

This we intend to consider in our next article, D.V. 

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (8)

Hoeksema's Interpretation of the Loosing of Satan

The explanation of the loosing of Satan, in Revelation 20:7-9, that I have given differs from that of Herman Hoeksema. Whereas I understand the loosing of Satan as Christ's freeing him to unite the nations under Antichrist in a worldwide assault upon the true church, Hoeksema explained it as referring to the battle of Armageddon.

The battle of Armageddon, mentioned only in Revelation 16:16, will be a physical war between two distinct elements of the kingdom of Antichrist. One element will be the nations of the West, descended from the old Roman empire, as Daniel 7:19-26 prophesies. These nations are strongly influenced by Christianity and, therefore, nominally Christian. From these nations, the personal Antichrist will arise, and among these nations will be the seat of power of the antichristian world-power.

The other element will be the pagan nations of the world. These are the nations referred to as "the kings of the east" in Revelation 16:12.

For a short time, Antichrist, the beast out of the earth of Revelation 13:1-10, will succeed in uniting these two groups of nations in one political federation, one kingdom, one empire, under his aegis. This will be the time of the great tribulation for the church (Matt. 24:21) and of the killing of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7-10).

But the magnificent kingdom of Satan and Man will last only a short while. For towards the very end of his-

tory, immediately before the coming of Jesus Christ, God will devastate the world-power of the Antichrist in His wrath. He will do so by the judgments of the seven vials of Revelation 16. One of these judgments—the sixth vial—will be the breakup of Antichrist's kingdom by the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16). The pagan nations of the East, whose attachment to the Antichrist was tenuous, will declare war on the nominally Christian nations of the West.

To the world engulfed in war, Jesus Christ will return in the body, to destroy the personal Antichrist, raise the dead, conduct the final judgment, renew creation, and usher in the new, everlasting age.

Hoeksema interpreted the loosing of Satan, resulting in the attack of the nations, Gog and Magog, upon the camp of the saints and the beloved city, in Revelation 20, as the battle of Armageddon. "What is here [in Rev. 20:7-9] presented in a separate vision had partly been pictured in a different setting in...Chapter 16:12-16...[as the] battle [that] will be realized in the period of the sixth vial."¹ In his outline of the contents of the book of Revelation, Hoeksema explained the loosing of Satan this way: "III. Satan loosed: 1. Deceives the nations: a. A great number. b. Their deception: 1) They purpose to fight against Christ and His Church. 2) Which actually in the nominally Christian world is Antichristendom. c. Once again the battle of Armageddon. Cf. chapter 16:12ff."²

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 650.

² Herman Hoeksema, "The Book of Revelation: Outline of Contents" (Grandville, MI: privately bound by the Protestant Reformed Seminary, n. d.), 95.

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Previous article in this series: May 15, 2010, p. 368.

Revelation 20:7-9, therefore, does not predict the war of Satan against the true church towards the end of history, but a battle of the heathen nations of the world against “the nominally Christian world,” against “nominal Christianity,” against “Christendom, no matter how apostate.”³

According to Hoeksema, the battle of Satan’s hordes against the camp of the saints and the beloved city will be a war of the pagan nations of the world against the nations that constitute the center of the antichristian world-power.

A Removal of the Church before the End

This explanation of the loosing of Satan and the battle that ensues is closely related to Hoeksema’s strange teaching that the true church will be taken out of the world into heaven at the onset of the outpouring of the wrathful judgments of God upon the antichristian kingdom, some time before the second coming of Christ.

Hoeksema proposed this event in his interpretation of the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses, in Revelation 11. The two witnesses represent the true church. The beast from the abyss, which is Antichrist, will make war against the two witnesses, overcome them, and kill them (Rev. 11:7). “After three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them” (Rev. 11:11, 12).

Hoeksema explained the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses as teaching that “before the time of the end, while the Antichrist and the Gog and Magog are still on earth, the church shall be taken away from her shame and persecution and terrible suffering. The living saints shall be changed. Those who have died shall be raised. And the church of Christ shall be glorified.” Prior to the judgments that fall on the antichristian kingdom, “the church is already in heaven.” After this deliverance of the church, “history shall be continued for a while.”⁴

Hoeksema returned to this teaching in his consideration of the seven vials, in Revelation 16. Noting that the

judgments of the seven vials “touch only the children of wrath,” Hoeksema explained: “I know of but one reason, namely, this, that the church has been taken away. At the beginning of these signs they have been taken up into glory, and they do not have to suffer because of these universal plagues.”⁵ Regarding the battle of Armageddon—the sixth vial—in Revelation 16:16, Hoeksema asserted: “In that last battle the people of God shall have no part. They shall have been taken away...The Lord will come as a thief, unexpectedly, unawares...to take His people away from the earth.... The church of God shall be upon earth no more.”⁶

He found the removal of the church from the earth before the coming of Christ also in the call to the saints to separate themselves from Babylon, in Revelation 18:4.

They shall be removed. The voice mentioned here will go forth with power; and the people of God shall be taken away from the world. Not, indeed, as if a long period would intervene between the removal of the last of God’s children and the end of the world; but they shall be removed. The voice...will call powerfully the faithful and chosen from the midst of the arena of strife and tribulation to be with Christ in glory forever.... And the purpose of this removal of the children of God is...that they not partake of her [Babylon’s] judgment. Before the final punishment is inflicted on Babylon, the children of God shall be no more in the world.⁷

Because Hoeksema identified the battle of Gog and Magog, in Revelation 20, with the battle of Armageddon and because, in his view, the true church will have been taken to heaven before the battle of Armageddon, the object of the attack of Satan’s army, in Revelation 20:7-9, cannot be the true church, but merely nominal Christendom. It is, therefore, either a rare inconsistency on Hoeksema’s part or, what is less likely, some doubtfulness about his own view that accounts for his allowance that the church “will still exist in [the] midst” of the “nominally Christian world” attacked by Gog and Magog and for his statement that when Gog and Magog attack the camp of the saints, that is (on Hoeksema’s view), the nominally Christian nations of the West, “the people of God shall

³ Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!*, 652, 654.

⁴ Ibid., 397, 398.

⁵ Ibid., 535.

⁶ Ibid., 551.

⁷ Ibid., 600.


look for the coming redemption, which shall then be very nigh.”⁸

Already during Hoeksema’s life, this peculiar feature of his eschatology, namely, Christ’s taking of the church out of the earth into heaven some time before His second coming, was challenged. The challenge, courteously framed as questions, put its finger on the obvious weaknesses of Hoeksema’s teaching: “Do you not teach here two future comings of the Lord? Is it your position that there will be no saints upon the earth at the final coming of Christ? Do not certain dispensationalists teach something similar to this in the ‘rapture’ theory?”

In his response, Hoeksema acknowledged that “I have been asked about [this teaching] by more than

⁸ Ibid., 652, 653.

one before.” Hoeksema was concerned to distinguish his view from the “rapture” doctrine of premillennial dispensationalism. But he resolutely defended his view: “The resurrection of the dead and the change of the living will take place in two stages with the destruction of Gog and Magog in between.”⁹

I regard Hoeksema’s explanation of the battle of Gog and Magog against the camp of the saints as mistaken and judge his teaching of the taking of the church away from the earth prior to Christ’s coming, upon which his explanation of the battle of Gog and Magog largely depends, as seriously erroneous. 

⁹ Herman Hoeksema, “Question: The Saints in Heaven before the Second Coming?” *Standard Bearer* 38, no. 4 (November 15, 1961): 76, 77.

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

“Largely a Matter of Terms”

In this article we continue the analysis of sixteen questions that Classis Southwest of the United Reformed Churches (URC) asked two representatives, Dr. J. Van Vliet and Dr. G. Visser, of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), professors at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In the May 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer* this column briefly examined the first eight questions as reported in the March 10, 2010 issue of *Christian Renewal*. The March 24, 2010 issue of *Christian Renewal* reported the last eight questions.

It became obvious in those first eight questions that Classis Southwest of the URC is concerned about the covenant theology of the CanRC in light of the plans for the union of these two denominations that are rolling ahead like a juggernaut and in light of the recent and well-known development in Reformed and Presbyterian churches of the federal vision heresy.

The men promoting the federal vision deny justification by faith alone. This has become the focus of many

current opponents of the federal vision. The URC questioners show this concern when they ask:

10. How exactly do ministers in the CanRC relate the confessional doctrine of justification *sola gratia, sola fide* [by grace alone and by faith alone—NJL] to their covenant doctrine?

15. Is the active obedience of Christ believed and preached by ministers in the CanRC? How influential has the rejection of the active obedience of Christ been in the CanRC?

To this we have no objections because that doctrine, recovered by the Reformation of the fifteenth century, is the article of the standing or falling church. That doctrine is at the heart of the peace, joy, and gratitude of the believer.

What many opponents seemingly ignore is that the federal vision denies justification by faith alone on the basis of a covenant view that they openly acknowledge is a development of the covenant doctrine of Dr. Klaas Schilder, the father of CanRC covenant theology. This covenant doctrine, which was rejected by the Protestant Reformed Churches in a fierce life and death struggle in the early 1950s, teaches that the covenant of God is established with every baptized child head for head and

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that every child receives the promise of the covenant. According to the two representatives of CanRC:

We (and, we believe, Schilder) would maintain that all children of believers, head for head, are truly in the covenant. They all receive the same promises. If they later err in unbelief, that is not because God did not really offer them life and salvation....

All are in the covenant, head for head; all receive the same promises; but not all respond in faith and obedience.

God does not establish His covenant only with the elect in Christ and give only to them the covenant promise, including faith. According to the CanRC and Schilder, God makes His covenant with every baptized child. The promise of the covenant that God gives to every baptized child does not include the gift of faith. Faith is the condition of the covenant that every baptized child must fulfill.

The federal vision has developed the implications of that covenant doctrine—a conditional covenant—and teaches that covenant salvation is fully conditional, including conditional justification by faith and good works.

This is a matter of some concern for Classis Southwest of the URC, and Classis Southwest demonstrates in its questioning of the CanRC that it is not ignorant of the fact that the federal vision's denial of justification by faith alone is based on a particular covenant doctrine.

In the face of questions about the federal vision, the CanRC representatives plainly admit that they are not fighting the federal vision. They are sympathetic with some of their emphases.

Astoundingly, the interview continued.

In the light of the last eight questions it becomes apparent why the interview continued. The question is now: What is all the fuss about in Classis Southwest?

The representatives of the CanRC seem to have the same question. Why all this questioning about our covenant view?

This comes out in their answers to several questions by Classis Southwest on other seemingly unrelated matters.

Classis Southwest predictably asks about common grace: "To what degree did Schilder reject 'common grace'

and how is this doctrine understood by ministers in the CanRC?"

Common grace is "grace" given by God to the reprobate ungodly that restrains sin in their hearts by the operation of the Holy Spirit so that they are not totally depraved but able to do works that are truly pleasing to God. It is "grace" given to the reprobate ungodly that is manifested in the "grace" in rain and sunshine on their fields. Common grace is a general, non-saving "grace" given to all men head for head.

Schilder, as is well-known, rejected the term *common grace*. It is unclear whether this was merely because Abraham Kuyper invented it (Schilder was opposed to all things Kuyperian), or because he genuinely disagreed. The URC, being the willing heirs of the doctrinal decisions of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) on common grace, are still very much ardent proponents of common grace. Classis Southwest of the URC evidently wants to be sure that their inevitable ecclesiastical companion "understands" this doctrine and does not have plans to be preaching against that sacred cow.

The CanRC responded: "The exact reason for this question is really not very clear to us," and the doctrine of common grace for us is "largely a matter of terms." Clearly, in the CanRC this doctrine is not heartily rejected as contrary to the Reformed creeds and Scripture. They evidently will not make an issue out of this doctrine. It is "largely a matter of terms."

Classis Southwest presses the matter and asks about the well-meant gospel offer, an insidious part of the original decision of the CRC with regard to common grace: "How widely, if at all, is the free or well-meant offer of the gospel accepted and practiced in the CanRC?"

The well-meant gospel offer is the false doctrine that teaches that God in the preaching of the gospel sincerely desires—wills—the salvation of all who hear and offers salvation to them on the condition that they repent and believe.

The URC, ardent champions of a non-saving and ineffectual "grace" toward the reprobate ungodly, also champion that "grace" to the reprobate in the well-meant gospel offer.

The representatives of the CanRC answer: "Again, the exact concern of this question is vague to us."

The URC questioners ask the CanRC professors:

How will CanRC ministers relate to those URCNA ministers and churches who not only hold to and preach the distinction between those internally/externally in the covenant, but for whom it is of the essence of Reformed covenant theology, since these two views [covenant view of CanRC and those who hold to the internal/external distinction—NJL] would seem to be mutually exclusive.

The external and internal distinction is terminology that was used by some covenant theologians to speak of two kinds of covenant members. The problem with the distinction is that it makes all baptized children covenant members in some respect. They are all “in the covenant,” albeit either externally in the covenant or internally in the covenant.

That this is how some covenant theologians used the distinction, the late CanRC professor Jelle Faber relates in his survey of some covenant theologians.¹ One of those covenant theologians was William Heyns, whose covenant doctrine was and still is influential. Heyns accepted a form of the distinction between internal/external membership in the covenant. Heyns also spoke of “covenant grace.” This covenant grace was a general grace that was given to every baptized child that actually changed every baptized child’s spiritual condition subjectively. But it was “a grace which does not insure salvation and yet takes from the covenant member all excuse.”²

Some grace! Cannot save you, but renders you without excuse.

Some may have used the distinction with good intention, but others, like Heyns, used this distinction, or some form of it, in order to make membership in the covenant wider than God’s decree of election and to deny Christ’s headship of the covenant. It is for this reason that the distinction is a bad one. Membership in the covenant is never wider than God’s eternal decree of election. Rather, the proper distinction in the covenant, a biblical

*Some grace!
Cannot save you,
but renders you
without excuse.*

¹ Jelle Faber and Klaas Schilder, *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism & Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger* (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications 1996), 29–35.

² Ibid., 40.

one according to Romans 9:6, is between those *in the covenant*—“Israel” and Jacob—and those *in the sphere of the covenant*—“of Israel” and Esau.

The covenant views of the CanRC and those who use the internal/external distinction only “seem to be mutually exclusive.” They are not. The issue between the CanRC and the URC is not the internal/external distinction. It is only an apparent difference.

The internal/external distinction can be made to bear all the freight that CanRC covenant theology could put into it. The representatives of the CanRC say so:

It is theoretically possible that some ministers preach an internal/external distinction within the covenant, and that this would be tolerated within the Canadian Reformed federation.

Theoretically this distinction would be tolerated, as long as it was understood to mean that membership in the covenant is wider than election and that all covenant members receive the promise.

CanRC would not tolerate a use of the internal/external distinction that defined it sharply in accordance with God’s decree of predestination. *Internally in the covenant* means union with Christ, the head of the covenant, and the reception of the unconditional promise of the covenant, including faith. Those in the covenant—internally—are the elect Jacobs of the covenant. *Externally in the covenant* means that some

are only in the sphere of the covenant. They are not members of the covenant, are not sanctified in Christ, and have no promise. They are the reprobate Esaus of the covenant.

But having parried the thrust of these questions, now a riposte!

In elaborating on their response to the question of the well-meant gospel offer, the CanRC professors ask their URC questioners: “How well-meant is the gospel offer to someone who is said to be in the covenant only externally?”

Interesting question!

Classis Southwest of the URC—concerned Reformed men, worried perhaps about the federal vision and the roots of that heresy in the covenant doctrine of Dr. K.

Schilder and proponents of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer—an interesting question for you: How well-meant is the gospel offer to someone who is said to be in the covenant only externally?

That question is interesting because the CanRC theologians answer the thinly veiled suspicions about their covenant view apparent in the questions of Classis Southwest by applying—rightly—the URC’s treasured doctrine of the well-meant gospel offer to the covenant.

If God sincerely desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel—elect and reprobate—and offers that salvation to them on the condition of their faith and repentance, then that must also be true in the covenant. In the covenant, salvation must be offered to all the baptized children conditioned upon faith and repentance.

To all of them.

Head for head, elect and reprobate.

God desires it, clean contrary to His decree of predestination.

Conditioned on faith.

After all, how well-meant is the gospel offer for someone who is said to be in the covenant only externally? Either Classis Southwest of the URC must mean something different by the internal/external distinction than they imply and how the distinction has been used by theologians in its history, or by that distinction, which they consider “the essence of Reformed covenant theology,” they mean basically the same as what William Heyns and others like him taught many years ago in the CRC about the covenant. All those baptized in the covenant are offered the promise—elect and reprobate.

Are not those two covenant views essentially the same? The one influenced by Klaas Schilder; the other incorporating the error of the well-meant gospel offer. All head for head receive the same promise. All is conditioned on the baptized child’s act of faith. Not all respond in faith and obedience. That is the wrong view of the covenant. That is a terrifying view of the covenant. That is an Arminian view of the covenant. But that is essentially the

same view of the covenant. It is a conditional covenant not governed by election.

The CanRC professors before the URC Classis Southwest were saying nothing different than a former professor of their denomination, Jelle Faber, said in a comment about Herman Hoeksema’s well-known and vigorous opposition to Heyns’ view of the covenant:

Hoeksema stated that the covenant conception of Heyns “has for many years been imbibed by many who now serve as ministers in the Christian Reformed denomination.” He regarded it [the covenant conception of Heyns—NJL] as one of the main causes for the adoption by Synod 1924 of the doctrine of a general offer of grace on God’s part in the preaching of the gospel.³

If you hold to the well-meant gospel offer, then you will have Heyns’ view of the covenant. If you have Heyns, then you will eventually have Schilder. If you have Schilder, then you will have the federal vision. Principles work through, slowly sometimes, but inextricably.

Faber himself openly regards the covenant theology of those influenced by Heyns and others like him to be essentially one with the covenant theology of the CanRC: “The kinship of the fifth dogmatician of Kampen [Schilder—NJL] with the American Secession theologians, also with Heyns, came out.”⁴

What is the fuss all about?

The CanRC professors having used the stick, now offer the carrot—well-meant no doubt—by quoting Jelle Faber:

‘God’s catholic church is being gathered, not in the unity of a perfect theology—however eagerly we should endeavor to obtain it—but in the unity of true faith, faith in the triune God of the covenant, the God of our baptism.’ It is in this spirit that we offer to you our answers to your questions.

³ Ibid., 44.

⁴ Ibid., 52.

*Principles
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but inextricably.*

The professors know the context of that quote. No doubt many of the URC questioners know the context of that quote. It comes from Jelle Faber's plea for the union of the CanRC and the then Independent Christian Reformed Churches (now URC) on the basis of the essential oneness of their covenant view with those of the CanRC and Klaas Schilder:


At the end of this twentieth century the *confessional* unity of Reformed confessors ought to find an *ecclesiastical* manifestation according to the demand of God and the prayer of Christ.⁵

⁵ Ibid., 53; emphasis is Faber's.

Faber saw what evidently Classis Southwest of the URC is either unable or unwilling to see: we agree in the essentials, also the essentials of the doctrine of the covenant.

You have a common, general, ineffectual "grace" in common grace, the well-meant gospel offer, and the covenant. Your heritage is the covenant theology of William Heyns and others like him. We will not bother you about those things.

We have a general, ineffectual "grace" to every baptized child in a general covenant promise. Our heritage is the covenant theology of Klaas Schilder, who stood in the same line as Heyns and others like him. Do not bother us about these things.

"It is," after all, "largely a matter of terms." 

GOD'S WONDERFUL WORKS

REV. JAMES LANING

The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth (7)

All Things Created for Christ

Why did God create this universe? Obviously He did not need anything. He is perfectly self-sufficient. Nor was He lonely. He enjoyed perfect fellowship within Himself as the triune God. So why did He create all the things that He did? What was His purpose in doing so?

Created for Christ

There are a number of passages in Scripture that tell us the reason why God created all things. In the book of Revelation, for example, we are told that He created all things for His own pleasure:

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour

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Previous article in this series: June 2010, p. 404.

and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy *pleasure they are and were created* (Rev. 4:11).

This passage provides us with a general answer as to why God created us and all things. It serves to point out that God did not need to create, but freely chose to create because it pleased Him to do so.

There are other passages, however, in which God gives us a more specific reason as to why He created all things. In those passages He tells us that He created all things for His Son:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: *all things were created by him, and for him*: (Col. 1:16).

The first three verses of the book of John teach that God created all things by His Son, who is called the Word of

God. But this passage in Colossians says that all things were created not only *by* God's Son, but *for* God's Son. God would glorify Himself in and through His Son, who would rule over all the creation to the glory of God's name.

Not for Adam, but for Christ

It is important to take note of the fact that it was for Christ—and not for Adam—that our Father in heaven created all things. Some think that God originally planned to glorify Himself in Adam, but that then when Adam fell into sin, God had to come up with another plan (a plan B, if you will), which involved sending His only begotten Son to save us. This, however, is not the case. God never has to resort to a plan B. Whatever God has purposed always comes to pass. Jehovah Himself declares that He always accomplishes His good pleasure (Is. 46:10). His plan is never frustrated.

So that means it was God's plan all along that Adam would fall, and that then Christ would come. God had something better planned for us from the very start. Adam was created as the head of the earthly creation, but not of the heavenly creation. Yet God from the beginning intended to unite all things both in heaven and in earth in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, God would

raise us to a life much higher than that which Adam ever could have enjoyed in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall. God created Adam perfect, it is true. But he was earthly, and it was possible for him to sin and to die. In Christ we would be no longer earthly, but heavenly. And in Him—and in Him alone—we would be able to obtain immortality. Unlike Adam, who was able to sin and die, we will forever be unable to sin and unable to die in Christ Jesus our heavenly Lord.

Living to serve Christ

God created all things for Christ, which means that we also have been created for Christ's sake. All God's creatures serve us; but they serve us that we may serve Christ. In Scripture we read that all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's (I Cor. 3:21–23).

This is what we must remember as we go about our work from day to day. God created all things for the sake of Christ, His Son. It is for His sake that we were created. So that means that all that we are and all that we have must be used to serve Him. This is the purpose for our existence. This is the reason why we were created. Thus it is only in the way of submitting to the Son that we will prosper, and experience true and abiding joy.



WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

MRS. JAN MIERSMA

Royal Children – Delighting in Our Father's World

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches." These words of Psalm 104:24 are echoed in the familiar hymn "How Great Thou Art." We sing this old favorite with great enthusiasm, and yet

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in our daily lives we are sometimes rather insensitive to God's "power throughout the universe displayed." We so easily fall into habits of life that cause us to take God's wonderful creation for granted. We don't spend much time wandering "through the woods and forest glades" or hearing "the birds sing sweetly in the trees." Because we don't, we miss many spiritual lessons by which God's "most elegant book...[leads] us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His power and divinity"

(Belgic Confession, Article 2). But when we take up the eyeglasses of Scripture, without which our eyes are blind to the wonders of the creation, our Father's handiwork will instruct and edify us unto a greater and greater enjoyment and praise of our Creator God.

One of the reasons that we seek a Christian education for our children is that they may learn to praise God with awe and understanding in and by all that He has made. Yet this education is meant to be just the beginning of a life of praising God for all His wonderful works and learning the spiritual lessons of creation. In the busyness of our daily lives, whether at work or play, we must take time to stand in awe of the mighty works of God and sing, with our minds and hearts thrilled, "How Great Thou Art!"

The fact that the creation is an organic whole stands as foundational principle for our delight in it. Man reveals some inkling of this in his emphasis upon ecology and in his ever-increasing awareness of the interrelatedness of the living creatures. And yet he misses the main point. As Christians we know that God purposed and determined by this interrelatedness, by this unity, His own glory in Jesus Christ. The universe must be the way it is so that God could enter it in our flesh and blood, and so that "in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Eph. 1:10). Moreover, God created it in such a way that "the earthly is created after the pattern of the heavenly" (Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, p. 235).

Knowing this, we avoid two dangers in our enjoyment and contemplation of this earthly creation. One danger is that we seek to understand it as an end in itself, and fall into the worship and service of "the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). The other is that we disparage the study of the earthly creation, relegating it to a non-spiritual "lower story." Rather, we as Reformed royal children will joyfully recognize that all things are

truly ours for God's sake, and we will seek to consecrate to our Father's glory the earthly creation by enjoying and studying it, seeking in it the many spiritual lessons He has placed there.

Can we find the time to do this in our busy lives? In reality, living in an awareness of the unity of God's work in the creation need not be as time-consuming as we sometimes imagine. The awareness can grow and

develop by something as ordinary as lawn work and gardening. I am not much of a gardener, but while working outdoors I have often been struck with spiritual realities God has put in His creation. As we weed our flower beds or vegetable gardens with our children, we can point to the importance of uprooting the whole weed. If we go out and simply chop the dandelions and thistles down to the ground, we can make our lawn or flower bed look better temporarily. The same is true of sins in our lives. We can deal with the outward aspects of our besetting sins and make ourselves look good to those around us, but if we don't deal with the root of

the sin, which is often our pride over against God and the neighbor, the sins will soon, like weeds, return and spring up even more abundantly. Just as keeping our gardens free of weeds requires constant vigilance, so too we need always to be on our guard against what we sometimes think of as "little" sins.

As we plant our gardens, we can talk about the seed as a picture of the seed of regeneration that God plants in our hearts. Although we cannot see the whole life of the plant hidden in that seed, we plant it in the assurance that seeds sprout and send forth tiny shoots and roots, eventually bearing their proper fruit. So it is with the life of faith in our children. We believe that God has implanted in the hearts of the seed of the covenant that seed of faith. Faith is truly there in its essence. Then, just as we exclaim with excitement when the first seed leaves push their way through the soil, we rejoice also when we see the life of faith showing visible signs in the lives of our

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children. Seeing this in a visible form impresses these spiritual truths more firmly on our hearts and minds.

In Proverbs 6:6, we read, “Go to the ant, thou slug-gard, consider her ways, and be wise.” And in Proverbs 30:24-28, we are instructed to study four things that are “exceeding wise,” including the spider. Matthew Henry comments on this:

Spiders are very ingenious in weaving their webs with a fineness and exactness such as no art can pretend to come near: They *take hold with their hands*, and spin a fine thread out of their own bowels, with a great deal of art; and they are not only in poor men’s cottages, but in *kings’ palaces*, notwithstanding all the care that is there taken to destroy them. Providence wonderfully keeps up those kinds of creatures, not only which men provide not for, but which every man’s hand is against and seeks the destruction of. Those that will mind their business, and *take hold of it with their hands*, shall be in *kings’ palaces*; sooner or later, they will get preferment, and may go on with it, notwithstanding the difficulties and discouragements they meet with. If one well-spun web be swept away, it is but making another.

Certainly the observation and study of the ant and spider should not be difficult for us, but instead of merely seeing them as pests to be eliminated, let us see and praise the wisdom God would impart to us by them.

God sends the weather. It is so easy to think of the weather as something that either just happens or is caused by “natural” laws. Yet think how often Scripture speaks of weather as revealing spiritual reality. Pause to enjoy the beauties of the sunrise, the amazing living painting that God gives us each day, and thank Him for the Sun of righteousness who arises in the dark night of our sin with healing in His wings.

As I write, a storm rages outside. The wind roars about the house and bends the trees with its mighty, yet invisible, power. So too the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, the mighty, rushing wind, not seen Himself, makes His presence known in great power in the lives of His people. Think how many times Scripture refers to storms and earthquakes as tokens of God’s judgment. When our children (and sometimes we ourselves) tremble with fear at these tokens, we should remember Psalm 29, which deals honestly with the terrifying na-

ture of storms and with the fact that God does indeed send them, but reminds us too that, “The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.”

What are some other ways we can grow in our delight in God’s creation? “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained...” (Ps. 8:3). This would imply that one of the reasons for the marvel of the heavens is that we might “consider” it, so that we might know the amazing wonder that, despite the fact that we are infinitesimal in comparison to this “work of thy fingers,” God visits us in Jesus Christ, giving Him, and us in Him, dominion over His creation. Find opportunities of going out at night and standing in awe of God’s work, just as the psalmist does in numerous psalms (8, 19, 74, 104, and 136). The more we learn of the vast expanse of the heavens, the greater will be our ability to glorify the God of Abraham and His covenant faithfulness to His promise, “... so shall thy seed be,” spoken when He showed Abraham the wondrous expanse of heaven in Genesis 15:5. With all our modern “wonders,” which enable us to have light continuously and to isolate ourselves from the creation and its power, we often lose sight of its true wonders.

We can listen to music any hour of the day or night, but how often do we arise early to hear the singing of the birds or just pause to listen awhile to this wonder of God’s creation? I recently came across an article by Dr. Margaret Helder entitled “Much Music,” reprinted from *Creation Dialogue* at <http://ldolphin.org/muchmusic.html>, which has some fascinating information to aid us in the appreciation of the songs of the birds. God laid the foundations for music here in their order, variety, and complexity. There is a beauty here that He made for us to delight in, to learn from, and to be edified by. How wondrous too that the birds sing to greet the dawning day, that rising of the sun, which God repeatedly sets forth as a figure of Christ and our redemption in Him.

Almost any natural setting has a wealth of beauty that God has put there for us as His people to enjoy. As a pastor and missionary’s wife, I’ve had the privilege of living and traveling through mountains, deserts, seacoasts, and seemingly endless miles of rolling prairie. Some are more spectacular than others, yet each scene had its own natural beauty.

Perhaps you long to see the mountains or the ocean, or to visit faraway lands. Don't wait for that yearning to be satisfied to enjoy the beauty of the creation. Savor what God has put before you today. Really look at the tree outside your window, the wildflowers along the roadway, the common sparrow or cowbird alighting on your lawn. We don't praise and glorify God when we take the beauties and wonders of His creation lightly.

To use a homely illustration, think how you would react if after you had spent many hours making something, perhaps a quilt, a fine woodworking project, or planting and caring for a beautiful arrangement of flowers in your garden, you showed it to someone and he merely glanced at it and said, "Yeah, that's nice." Wouldn't you regard his praise as more genuine and heartfelt if he would carefully look at your work, comment on the beauty of the design, the fineness of the carving, or the beauty of the combination of colors and textures?

So spend time delighting in God's creation. Take walks in the woods or fields. Don't wait for perfect weather. Enjoy the weather God sends (providing it's safe) by experiencing the "stormy wind fulfilling His word," delighting in the "cheering rain," or praising Him in the midst of the beautiful whiteness of the snow and silvery hoar frost, remembering that our sins are washed as white as snow (Is. 1:18).


Get some field guides from the library, or invest in a few. Distinguishing God's creatures, whether birds, bugs, or flowers, isn't a matter of showing how much you know. It's a way of delving into and delighting in the diversity and beauty of the creation, of finding more matter for wonder and praise. There are many resources available

today to guide our appreciation and understanding of God's wonderful creation from a Christian perspective. We have excellent articles in the *Standard Bearer* from

time to time. Two providers of creation science materials that come to mind are the Institute for Creation Research and Answers in Genesis. Perhaps our church libraries could include some of their books or visual resources (if they do not already). They will be especially helpful when, time and finances permitting, we are able to visit a zoo, aquarium, conservatory, planetarium, or museum. Not only will some preparatory work pay off in terms of making the visit more profitable, but because some of these institutions are bastions of the evolutionary worldview, being forearmed with answers or good questions to ask will help us to interpret the exhibits from a biblical perspective.

School field trips are great, but what our children see in how we as parents respond to God's creation will have an even more powerful and lasting impact. From our example too, children will learn the principles of stewardship of God's creation and the proper respect

for God's creatures that ought to shine forth in us. This creation belongs to God, and He will hold us accountable for how we use it and how we treat His creatures.

When we walk in this enjoyment of God's creation, we will be edified. We will experience how small and helpless we are and how great our God is. Seeing His wonderful work, viewed through the spectacles of Scriptures, we will join with the psalmist in singing, "The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works.... I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being" (Ps. 104:31, 33). 

*Savor
what God has put
before you today.
Really look at
the tree outside
your window,
the wildflowers
along the roadway,
the common sparrow
or cowbird alighting
on your lawn.
We don't praise
and glorify God
when we take
the beauties
and wonders
of His creation
lightly.*

The Gospel of the Mediator

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 6

Question 16. Why must He be very man, and also perfectly righteous?

Answer. Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned should likewise make satisfaction for sin; and one who is himself a sinner cannot satisfy for others.

Question 17. Why must He in one person be also very God?

Answer. That He might, by the power of His Godhead, sustain in His human nature the burden of God's wrath; and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life.

Question 18. Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God and a real righteous man?

Answer. Our Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Question 19. Whence knowest thou this?

Answer. From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and, lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.

Our first inclination when we come to this Lord's Day is to skip to the last question because the first three questions seem so repetitive and simple. But if we stop and consider what is being said here, we see that the Catechism is answering two of the most important questions any person could ask. The background to this Lord's Day is the sinner's knowledge of his misery and hopelessness, and now we come to the questions, "Who is your Mediator?" and "How do you know Him?" How crucially important these questions are! Now, finally, the Catechism presents to us our Savior and tells us how we come to know Him.

A Real but Sinless Man

Was Jesus a real man? Did he have a complete human nature, a human body as well as a human soul? For cen-

turies, the early church debated this question. Some said that He was only part human, having a human body but a divine soul. Others said He only seemed to be human, that His body was only a shell for God to live in. Still others confused or mixed His natures, so that He was seen as some created third thing, a mixture of God and man, but not truly man.

Here, there is no need for us to repeat everything that was said about the Mediator in connection with Lord's Day 6, except to emphasize that our Savior had to have our human nature, and yet not have our sinful nature. He must be a child of Adam in his humanity, but not a son of Adam that inherits Adam's sinful nature. The human race could never produce a sinless man.

God, by the miracle of the virgin birth, created a human nature for Jesus that did not inherit Adam's original sin or depravity. Mary was not simply a container, which carried God, but Jesus was born of the flesh and blood of Mary. His conception was a miracle, an extraordinary work of God by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary,

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Previous article in this series: June 2010, p. 398.

but from a physical point of view, everything thereafter was just as normal as the pregnancy and birth of any other child. And so Jesus was a real human, of “the seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16); “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3); “made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4); “made flesh” (John 1:14); “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). This is truth, for “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2).

As a real man, Jesus could be the substitute of real men before God, something an angel or animal could not be. As a sinless man, He was free from any liability to punishment Himself. As a complete man, He could suffer for and redeem our bodies as well as our souls, which otherwise would both suffer eternally in hell.

True God of True God

Confessing that Jesus was a true man in no way takes away from who He is and was eternally, God the second person of the Trinity. Eternally Jesus was equal with the Father. In His divine person, He fully possessed the true nature of God. The Bible ascribes to Him divine names, divine attributes, divine works, and divine honor. He Himself plainly taught the people that He was the Son of God and equal with the Father—“I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

The early church also wrestled with the question of whether Jesus was truly God. Some said He was the greatest of God’s creatures but not actually God. Others said He gained the status of being God through His obedience. Others taught that He had two persons, one divine and one human, and so God did not live in the human nature. Others taught that His person was divine, but that His nature was a mixture, not fully divine and not fully human.

The truth is that our Savior is the one person of the Son of God, and that He has two distinct natures. The second person of the Trinity added to His divine nature a human nature in which He consciously lived and suffered, and in which today He still lives in glory. This is a mystery that we do not fully understand, but these are the biblical facts, and it had to be this way.

Because He is true God, He was able to suffer the awful wrath of God that we deserve. If man would try to do this, even a sinless man, he would be destroyed. It would

be like a fireman going into a raging fire without his fireproof gear and breathing apparatus. The fireproof gear that our Mediator needed to be able to endure hell was that He must be as strong as the God who punished Him. While Jesus suffered in the flesh, the power of His divine nature sustained Him, so that he paid for our sin without ever becoming disobedient and bitter toward God. While He went through all the suffering of hell that we all deserve, our Savior loved His Father perfectly.

Our Lord Jesus Christ

In the answer to question 18, Jesus is presented to us as our perfect Mediator. Three things should be noted about this.

First, this is a personal confession. When I say that He is my Mediator, who is a real and sinless man and at the same time true God, I am not simply doing mathematics or laying down theological arguments that all add up and make sense. No, to say Jesus is my Mediator is to confess that I need Him as Savior. It is of utmost importance that I have Him. There is no other way for me. Because of my sin, I have nowhere else to turn.

Second, I confess that Jesus is everything I need in a Savior. He is a complete and all-sufficient Savior. Nothing can be added to His work. He has fully satisfied the justice of God. All that is required for our restoration into fellowship with God has been accomplished by Him.

And third, He is freely given me, of God. Jesus is the gift of God’s grace to undeserving sinners. Sinful man did not desire Christ, did not ask for Him, did not deserve Him, and does not accept Him. “He was despised and rejected of men” (Is. 53:3). God, who was under no obligation to us, “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16), and “commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). And with Him, He freely gives us all things for body and soul. Even repentance and faith are gifts to us (Eph. 2:8).

Do you confess your unworthiness and see salvation in its entirety as a work of God’s grace?

Revealed in the Gospel

How do we know Jesus the Savior? We know Him through God’s gracious revelation. God has spoken

through His Son, and because of this we know Jesus the Savior. The gospel has its origin in God. The gospel is announced by God. The gospel is realized by God.

This gospel, which is the good news of Jesus the Mediator, God revealed from the very beginning of the world. After Adam and Eve had fallen, when they were lost in darkness and engaged in sin with the Devil, when they “trembling fled from the presence of God,” He “was pleased to seek and comfort” them, “promising [them] that He would give His Son” and again “make [them] happy” (Belgic Confession, Art. 17). God continued announcing this gospel all through the Old Testament to and through the saints as they knew and spoke the promise of Christ. God also gave special sacrifices and ceremonies to represent Christ visually to His people. All of this was God’s gracious revelation of the gospel. The whole Bible, the Old Testament just as much as the New, is about Christ our Mediator. Jesus says of the Old Testament writings, “They are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

Today, we have the gospel fully revealed to us in Jesus Christ, in the full Scriptures, and in the true preaching of the gospel. The New Testament Scriptures complete the Old by presenting Christ’s life, ministry, death, resurrection, and glory as the great fulfillment and realization of the gospel. Today God speaks to us through the Bible, His inspired, trustworthy, and complete revelation. In a day of ignorance and searching for truth, it is wonderful to hold in your hands and believe God’s special revelation.

Hand in hand with the Bible is the preaching of the gospel. God never intended His Word to stay on paper, but gave it as something to be declared and proclaimed to the ends of the earth for the salvation of sinners. This preaching is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). Because of this, the heart of all true preaching must be the message of Christ and the cross. Paul says of his preaching, “I determined not to


know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2).

Responding to the Gospel

The saving response to the gospel is to believe on Jesus Christ as your Savior, and to do this by humble confession of and grief over your sin and a looking to and trusting in Jesus alone as Savior. The response is also to believe and value very highly the Word of God by studying it, by following its directives, by learning its doctrines, and by seeing Christ in it. And the response is also to find and place yourself under a true ministry of the Word in a church that is faithful to the Scriptures.

How do you respond to the gospel of Christ?

Questions for Discussion

1. What important questions are answered in this Lord’s Day? What makes them so important?
2. Why did Jesus have to be a sinless but real human? Can you answer this personally?
3. Did Jesus have a human soul? Why is this important?
4. Did Jesus have a human body? Why is this important?
5. What would have happened if a mere man tried to suffer what Jesus did on the cross?
6. Why did Jesus have to be God? What does this say about the enormity of your sin?
7. By what miracle did God provide the perfect and complete Savior?
8. What basic thing did God tell Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15?
9. What important thing do all the sacrifices of the Old Testament teach us?
10. How does God reveal the same gospel to us today?
11. Why is it important for the Christian to hear “true gospel preaching”? 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

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

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI invited all interested parties to attend this year’s Summer Parenting Work-

shop. This year’s workshop was a continuation of the series from Tedd Trip that First started last summer. The dates were set for the last three Wednesday nights of June

and all the Wednesday nights of July. This year's workshop promised to give good instruction about different age groups and how to parent them in a godly manner.

The Reformed Witness Committee of Hope PRC in Walker, MI presented their annual Summer Class Series for 2010 on each Tuesday in the month of July. Prof. Herman Hanko was scheduled to speak each week on the theme, "A Survey of the Book of Revelation."

Minister Activities

We are sure that we echo the sentiments of our readers when we extend to Seminarians Daniel Holstege and Martyn McGeown our congratulations on their graduating from the Protestant Reformed Theological School this June. In addition to our congratulations, we also give thanks to our heavenly Father for providing these men for the ministry of the Word.

Since Seminarian McGeown passed his synodical examination and graduated from our Seminary, the Council of our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, where Mr. McGeown is a member, declared him to be eligible for a call and presented his name to their congregation to call him to be their missionary based in Limerick, the Republic of Ireland, working with the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. A significant congregational meeting, to say the least. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this event for our sister-church congregation, which is located in a country where the Reformed faith is scarce. We

thank God that He has been pleased to give them a second minister and a field where he might labor. A call was extended to Candidate McGeown on Sunday, July 4.

Since our last "News," Rev. Garrett Eriks and Rev. John Marcus declined the calls they received from the Edgerton, MN and Trinity (Hudsonville, MI) PRC's respectively.

Rev. Michael De Vries has accepted the call to serve as the next pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC.

Calls to "come over and help" were extended to Rev. Garrett Eriks from the First PRC in Holland, MI, and to Rev. Andrew Lanning from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI.

Rev. Dennis Lee preached his farewell sermon to the congregation of the Edgerton, MN PRC on Sunday evening, June 20, preaching from Jude 20-21 under the theme, "Keep Yourselves in the Love of God."

Rev. Lee and his family have since moved to Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, where, the Lord willing, he will be installed on July 9 as their fourth pastor, with Prof. David Engelsma officiating.

Mission Activities

The Domestic Mission Committee of our churches sponsored another "Mission Awareness Day" on Saturday, June 12, at Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. This day serves to inform and inspire members of our denomination about our mission work. Sectionals included speeches and multimedia presentations on topics such as the history of our new Heritage PRC congregation in Sioux Falls, SD; the ongoing work in Myanmar; life as a missionary in the Philippines; and much more. An ethnic lunch gave the

attendees also a "taste" of everyday life on the mission field.

Rev. and Mrs. Daniel Kleyn traveled to Singapore and the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church there to be part of their annual Family Camp. This year's camp was held June 14 to June 18 at the Awana Genting Highlands Resort in Malaysia. About 120 registered for the camp this year. Rev. Kleyn preached four times in Singapore and also gave five speeches during the week on the theme, "We Are One," based on Ephesians 4.

Prof. Russell Dykstra and Prof. Barry Gritters traveled to Namibia on June 17. They went to Namibia on behalf of our churches' Contact Committee to visit with six Reformed churches who have requested the Contact Committee to send a delegation. They met also with a contact in South Africa. The main focus of this visit was to introduce these contacts to the teaching of the PRC and to find a common appreciation for and commitment to the Reformed creeds and the doctrine of sovereign grace. They planned to return home on July 8, the Lord willing.

Young People's Activities

The YP Activity Committee of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA organized a softball game activity for parents and young people for July 7. We assume that means parents vs. teenagers for the game. Refreshments followed.

The Young People's Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA had a window-washing fund-raiser during the month of July. For a donation

they promised to wash the inside and outside of all the windows of your house. Not a bad deal for our Hope congregation. Too bad they are not closer to our house!

Denomination Activities

The Senior Singles Fellowship of our west Michigan churches held their most recent monthly dinner and program on June 17 at the

Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. Mr. Bruce Klamer gave a Power-Point presentation on the various aspects of the Reformed Witness Hour radio ministry. ☞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ We rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

REV. ARIE and SHERRY DENHARTOG,

as they celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on August 19, 2010. As their children we give thanks to God for the many years with which He has blessed them. We are so thankful for their godly example and the years of love, devotion, and sacrifices they have made. May they continue to experience God's blessings in the years ahead. "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:3, 4).

☼ Jeffrey & Sara Potjer

Heidi, Colleen, Caleb, Adam

☼ Jonathan & Ronda denHartog

Melody, Stefan

☼ Russell & Lisa Potjer

Isabella, Carter

☼ Darin & Amy Gritters

Ashlee, Isaac, Brelynn

☼ Timothy & Carisa denHartog

Cory, JayAnn, Taylor

☼ Matthew & Joy denHartog

Derek, Ethan

☼ Anthony & Laura VanDonselaar

Wyoming, Michigan

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Men's Society of the Hope PRC in Walker expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to member Mr. John Buiter and his family in the death of his sister,

BERTHA DEVRIES.

May they continue to experience the Lord's sustaining grace and the comfort of His word in Psalm 135:5, 6: "I know that the LORD is great, and that our LORD is above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places".

Harry Langerak, President
James Schimmel, Secretary

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to God, we rejoice with our parents,

EDWIN and CLARICE GRITTERS,

as they celebrate 60 years of marriage on September 1, 2010, D.V. We are grateful to our heavenly Father for His constant faithfulness, and for giving us parents who have raised us in His fear. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless them and keep them in His care. "The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

☼ Jerry and Shirley VanderKolk

☼ Ed and Jeanne Karsemeyer

☼ Barry and Lori Gritters

☼ Mike and Brenda Gritters

☼ Roger and Beth Gritters

☼ Rick and Shari Gritters

29 Grandchildren, 1 in glory

30 Great-grandchildren

Redlands, California

RFPA Annual Meeting

■ RFPA Annual Meeting, Thursday, September 23, 7:30 P.M., at Hope PRC.

Wedding Anniversary

■ With gratitude to God for His faithfulness we announce the 40th anniversary of our parents,

Rev. Thomas and Janice Miersma,
on August 22, 2010.

We have been greatly blessed by their instruction and guidance over many years. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to sustain them in their walk as a married couple and in their service to the Lord. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Their loving children:

☼ Christopher Miersma

☼ Jonathan Miersma

☼ Matthew Miersma

Lacombe, Alberta Canada

Wedding Anniversary

■ On August 1, 2010, the Lord willing, our parents,

JAMES AND GLADYS KOOLE,

will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for the godly instruction that they have given to us as well as the godly example they have set in their marriage. We pray that the Lord will continue to guide them and bless them in their marriage, that it may reflect the union of Christ and His church.

"For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

☼ Matt and Stephanie DeBoer

Jacob

☼ Mike and Rachel Cnossen

Michael and Joelle

☼ Sarah Koole

☼ Peter Koole

☼ Leah Koole

☼ Rebecca Koole

☼ David Koole

☼ Monica Koole

☼ Lydia Koole

☼ Tyler Koole

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Hull PRC council and congregation express their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Craig Hoksbergen and children, and Mr. and Mrs. Don Hoksbergen, in the death of their son, brother, and grandson,

LOGAN DEAN HOKSBERGEN.

May they find comfort in God's Word as found in Psalm 122:8, 9: "For my brethren and companion's sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good."

Jim Andringa, President

Gerald Brummel, Clerk of Records

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE
CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES
Hull, IA - Tuesday, August 31, 2010

The Divine Act of Creation

*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made;
and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*
Psalm 33:6

9:00 A.M. - Keynote Address

Ex Nihilo: The Reformed Confessions on the Doctrine of Creation

Rev. Nathan Langerak, Pastor,
South Holland PRC, South Holland, IL

10:30 A.M. - Breakout Sectional

The Witness of the Old Testament to Creation Ex Nihilo:

A. The Law and the Prophets

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Pastor,
Randolph PRC, Randolph, WI

B. The Poetic Books

Rev. John Marcus, Pastor,
First PRC, Edmonton, AB

12:00 P.M. - Lunch (freewill offering
to defray expenses)

1:00 P.M. - Breakout Sectional

A. Creation and Christ

Rev. Thomas Miersma, Pastor,
Immanuel PRC, Lacombe, AB

B. Survey of the Ecclesiastical Scene Regarding Creation Ex Nihilo

Rev. Allen Brummel, Pastor,
Heritage PRC, Sioux Falls, SD

2:45 P.M. - Conclusion

"When I consider": The proper effect of the doctrine on the child of God

Rev. Martin VanderWal, Pastor,
Hope PRC, Redlands, CA

All past and present officebearers,
as well as all other interested people, are invited to attend.

Notice

■ Classis West of the PRC will convene at the Hull PRC in Hull, IA on Wednesday, September 1, 2010, at 8:30 A.M. In conjunction with this meeting of classis, an officebearers' conference is being planned for Tuesday, August 31. Any who intend to submit material for the agenda of classis are asked to notify the stated clerk of this at your earliest convenience, and to have all material in his hands by Monday, August 2, 2010. Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Hull's clerk, Mr. Don VerMeer, at (712) 725-2505 or at donver@mtcnet.net.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,
Stated Clerk

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 8, 2010 at the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 8, 2010.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour August 2010

Date	Topic	Text
August 1	"True Faith"	II Timothy 1:12
August 8	"The Creation"	Psalms 19:1-6
August 15	"The Secret Providence of God"	Psalms 139:1-6
August 22	"Who Is Jesus?"	Acts 4:12
August 29	"The House Upon a Rock"	Matthew 7:24-27