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Called a Nazarene

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:23

Jesus must be called a Nazarene. That is to say, He must grow up in the city of Nazareth, and the people of that day must recognize that. We ourselves must recognize Him as such.

Why must we know Him as a Nazarene?

The fact that Jesus was called a Nazarene fulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning Him. Although the prophets in the Old Testament never said in so many words that "Christ would be called a Nazarene," what they prophesied about Jesus was fulfilled when He was labeled as the prophet from Nazareth. The label "of Nazareth" is important. Even Jesus referred to Himself

with that label when He spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus: "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."



Why Nazareth?

To begin with, Nazareth was located in Galilee.

We ourselves might have positive thoughts concerning Galilee, the place of Jesus' earthly ministry. However, in that day, the Jews viewed Galilee in a negative light. Galilee was considered to be full of ignorant people. When the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, the people who heard the disciples speak in tongues were all the more amazed because Galileans were speaking in other languages.

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? (Acts 2:6-7).

Galileans had a reputation for being unschooled.

Furthermore, Galilee was referred to as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (cf. Matt. 4:12-16). By reason of its location, the people of Galilee mixed with the Gentiles. Add to that the fact that Galilee was far removed from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religion and education, and we can see why Galilee was despised as a land of spiritual ignorance.

The Gospel of John records one occasion in which the Jews were disputing about Jesus.

Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet (John 7:50-52).

"Nicodemus, are you also from Galilee?" As if to say, "Are you also unschooled and ignorant?"

Jesus was from the despised region of Galilee.



More than that, Jesus was from the city of Nazareth in that region.

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Now, if you asked an ordinary Galilean in that day what he thought of Nazareth, he would tell you he despised Nazareth. Nathanael, a Galilean, despised Nazareth. Though Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed, in whom [was] no guile," he had little good to say about Nazareth.

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see (John 1:45-46).

Galileans despised Nazareth.

We don't know whether it was because of the number of pagan people who lived in Nazareth, or their lack of education, or their rude character. But most people in that day who had any sense of dignity would not have esteemed Nazareth.

The name Nazareth itself points to its lowly character. The name Nazareth likely comes from the Hebrew word *netser*, which means twig, or sprout, or sucker. A netser was a small outgrowth from a larger stump. A netser was an insignificant and even despised part of a tree. The little town of Nazareth was not a stately tree; it was a despised sprout in Israel.

Jesus grew up in the despised city of Nazareth.



Amazingly, even the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus. When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He went to the synagogue in Nazareth and taught the people. In front of the people of His own hometown, Jesus read from a prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Messiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the bro-

kenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:18-21).

Jesus preached the wonderful news that He was the promised Messiah.

But instead of receiving Him, the people of Nazareth despised Him: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (cf. Luke 4:22). "Is this not the carpenter?" (cf. Mark 6:3). Who does this man think he is? Certainly, this man is nothing special. When Jesus rebuked them because they refused to honor a prophet from their own country, they tried, in their anger, to kill Him. They took Him to the edge of a cliff on which the city of Nazareth was built and tried to throw Him off.

How striking! Jesus of Nazareth was despised by the people of Nazareth, who were despised by the Galileans, who were, in turn, despised by the people of Israel.

Jesus of Nazareth was despised and rejected by those who were themselves despised. Jesus of Nazareth was despised in the greatest degree.

But that's the way it had to be. God had decreed it. Indeed, the prophets foretold this rejection centuries before it happened.

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people (Ps. 22:6).

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Is. 53:3).



How appropriate, then, that Jesus should be called a Naza-

rene. How appropriate that He, who is called "the Branch," the *Netser*, should come out of Nazareth. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his root" (Is. 11:1). Jesus is that branch, that seemingly insignificant twig. Though the great tree of David had been cut down, and all that was left was a stump, yet, far away from the city of David, a little shoot would grow up. God's Spirit would rest on Him without measure so that He would bring salvation to His people.

Why so despised?

His humiliation was for us. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). He was nailed to the cross as the Nazarene. Indeed the very superscription above Him identified Him that way: "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). That's our comfort. Jesus of Nazareth was rejected for us. He was despised and rejected so that we would be accepted into God's family. He experienced the curse that we deserved so that we would be blessed. Jesus rejected all that earthly glory, choosing rather to be despised in order to obtain the greater glory of His heavenly kingdom.

Unbelievers used the label "Nazarene" as a label of contempt upon Jesus and His followers. The apostle Paul was called a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (cf. Acts 24:5). But, for us, the name "Jesus of Nazareth" has a sweet sound. That's because Jesus of Nazareth is not despicable any more; He is now exalted in the highest heaven. He has gained the victory over Satan, and sin, and death.

Jesus of Nazareth, despised and rejected...

For our salvation!



To Be or Not to Be Reformed: Maintaining the Formula of Subscription (4)

The Reformed confessions are the substance of the Reformed faith, which is to say, the truth of the Bible. Every officebearer in a Reformed church must believe these truths. By signing the Formula of Subscription (FOS), the man confesses that he is wholly convicted of these truths. The FOS also binds a man to uphold and defend them.

What could be wrong with that? An honest, Reformed man wonders why anyone would object to such a form. But in fact objections are raised against strict subscription to such a form. One such objection was addressed in the last issue, namely, that such a form elevates the confessions higher than they ought to be.

The more significant argument, one consistently raised against maintaining the FOS, is that it is too restrictive. It is soon evident that some of the objectors chafe under this FOS. That is cause for great concern.

It is alleged that the FOS silences the officebearer. It does not allow discussion of doctrines on the cutting edge of theology for fear of deposition. The form's critics point to Luther, that he dared to post the ninety-five theses, though the theses were contrary to the accepted dogmas of the church. Hence, they maintain, there will be no reformation when it is needed, and no development of doctrine.

That argument is false. How could the confessions be too restrictive? If the confessions *do* accurately teach what Scripture teaches, then the officebearer is simply bound by the Bible. Surely no believer objects to that!

In fact, the confessions do not hamper theological discussion. They should do the opposite, namely, encourage further discussion and pursuit of the truth. In harmony with that, confessions do set the boundaries, and channel the discussion in right paths. The church delights in discussions of the Bible and of doctrine, but the church is not a debating society where every position imaginable may be proposed and debated. On the contrary, the church is the pillar and ground of the truth.

Rightly understood, the confessions form the basis of future development of doctrine. For the truth is one. Doctrine established and elucidated in the past becomes the foundation for further development. But such development must be building *up*, reaching *higher*, giving *better* knowledge of God. It is not building out and off the foundation of the confessions. Building off the foundation results in deformation.

We must not overlook the fact that the confessions are the work of the Spirit of Christ, guiding the church into the truth (John 16:13). Through controversy, forcing the church to search Scripture, and to reject the lie, the Spirit guides the church. The church arrives at the

point where she writes down her confession of what she believes to be the truth of the word of God.

These confessions are not infallible. Accordingly, the church allows for careful changing of her confessions. But the confessions are highly regarded because Christ promised His church that His Spirit would work this way, guiding the church into the truth.

Yet there remain members of churches in the Reformed camp who object to the use of a FOS. Is the FOS necessary? History says: Emphatically yes!

The Struggle to Maintain

After the great Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands declined spiritually. Liberalism abounded and false doctrine was tolerated. Napoleon added the Netherlands to his empire for a time and displaced the House of Orange. When William I returned from his refuge in England in the early eighteen hundreds, he pressed upon the Reformed Church the English model of a church under the authority of the crown. The ecclesiastical assemblies became boards, with members appointed by the king or his officials. These were dark days for the Reformed.

In 1816, the Reformed Church's synodical board changed the FOS that Dordt had approved in 1619. The new FOS became ambiguous in two respects. The Form stated: "...We in good faith accept and sincerely

*Previous article in this series:
February 1, 2010, p. 196.*

believe the doctrine which, according to God's Holy Word, is contained in the accepted forms of unity of the Netherlands Reformed Church...."

Notice, first, that it did not specify the three confessions, but only "the accepted forms of unity of the Netherlands Reformed Church." This would allow particular synods or classes to identify "the accepted form of unity." In fact, it gives leeway to leave out one or more of the confessions, something that was done in a few instances.

Second, the expression, "We... accept...the doctrine which, according to God's Holy Word, is contained in the accepted forms of unity," is open to interpretation. It could mean one of two things. On the one hand, the officebearer could mean that he accepted the doctrines in the confessions *because* they were in harmony with the word of God. That is the meaning that Dordt's form demanded. On the other hand, it could mean that he accepted the doctrines *that* were in harmony with the word of God. Such a promise makes the FOS of no account. And, notice, the individual officebearer himself was the judge.

This change in the FOS cut the Reformed church loose from her doctrinal anchor. She was soon blown about by every wind of false doctrine. The spiritual decline of the church accelerated.

This led to two reformations. The first was the Secession of 1834, led by such men as H. De Cock, S. Van Velzen, A. Van Raalte, and H. Scholte. These reformers, committed to the truth set forth in the confessions, saw what the imprecise language of the FOS had allowed. Therefore, almost immediately after the Secession churches came together, they returned to the FOS approved by Dordt.

The second reform movement was the Doleantie, led by

Abraham Kuyper, in 1886. The churches of the Doleantie were equally intent on maintaining the Reformed truths, and determined to root out false doctrine. Accordingly, they likewise returned to the Dordt-adopted FOS.

These two groups soon united in the GKN (*Gereformeerde Kerken Nederlands*, formed in 1892). The GKN remained the strongest Reformed church in the Netherlands for some time. But in the 1970s they revised their FOS at the crucial point. It read, "We promise, in the unity of the true faith, to remain faithful to the confession of the church which the fathers have expressed in the three general creeds and in the three Forms of Unity." The vague language meant the end of genuine adherence to the confessions.

Over the years the Reformed Church (*Hereformde Kerk*, virtually the state church) continued to downgrade the FOS, until in the 1950s they reduced the promise to this extent: The signers promised to do their work "in communion with the confession of the fathers." That is obviously a meaningless and empty promise.

Such blatant disregard for the confessions resulted in the loss of everything Reformed. Both of these apostate churches joined with a third (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands) forming the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (2004). The doctrinal and moral corruption is evident from the fact that the PKN cannot hold the line even against the vile sin of homosexuality. (It is officially tolerated in their church order.)

A similar decline occurred in the American branches of the Reformed churches. The Reformed Church of America organized in the 1790s. It adopted a Church Order that included subscription to the form adopted by Dordt. That did not last. In the 1970s the promise in the FOS

was downgraded to: "I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witness to the Word of God." Clearly, that does not bind anyone to maintain or defend the Reformed confessions. The RCA's departure from Reformed faith and practice is evident to all. Today, a main topic in the denomination is toleration for homosexuality.

Over the last fifty years, the Christian Reformed Church has carried on much discussion on the FOS. Reading only the official decisions, one might conclude that they have held the line. CRC synods have refused to grant requests for significant revision of the FOS. They admonished men to sign the form honestly. A modernization of the language in the 1980s did not change the essential promises. So reads the official records.

But the periodicals and synodical reports tell a different story. CRC officebearers wrote in the 1970s of signing the FOS with mental reservations, or, with tongue in cheek. In addition, officebearers publicly contradicted the confessions without bringing a gravamen. In the *Banner* (1970s), a Christian Reformed minister pointed out that ordained ministers had been openly teaching theistic evolution, questioning the infallibility of Scripture, teaching that God loves all men redemptively, and denying reprobation. That is, as he rightly maintained, a violation of the promise made by signing the FOS.

In the last decade CRC men spoke openly of problems with signing the FOS. The editor of the *Banner*, Bob DeMoor, wrote concerning those who have reservations about signing the FOS. "The traditional response to new officebearers voicing such hesitation has been, 'Just shaddap, swallow hard, and sign.'"

Rev. Gordon Pols of West End CRC in Edmonton was quoted in the *Banner* a few years ago

(2005): "I can still remember, in my classical examination, being asked if I could sign the Form of Subscription.... I said, 'Well, yes, but I have some difficulty with the Canons.' The response was, 'Well, we all do.' And then we moved on."

More evidence that the FOS is ignored is found in a disturbing committee report to the CRC synod in 2005. This committee related that a number of congregations no longer required their officebearers to sign the FOS. A synodically appointed committee came to the synod of 2008 with a total revision of the FOS, called a Covenant of Ordination. It elimi-

nated the binding nature of the confessions, and would allow an officebearer to sign and interpret the new form as he will. Objections were raised, and Synod 2008 returned the matter to another committee for revision. Yet it should be obvious that it does not really matter, because the confessions have been ignored for years by those that violated their vows by teaching contrary to the confessions. The sad reality is, the CRC lost the battle for the confessions years ago.

This brief review of history brings out two preliminary conclusions.

First, the binding nature of the confessions must be maintained if a Reformed church will maintain its doctrinal purity, its unity, and its integrity.

Second, if the FOS is to be of any value, the church must be willing to exercise Christian discipline for departure from the confessions.

Next time, D.V., the liturgical forms and the Church Order – are these binding on the officebearers who sign the FOS? And what are the implications for the members of the church who, not being officebearers, do not sign the FOS?



Sounding Out the Word

Rev. Carl Haak

The Call to Know God

Reformed Witness Hour

A distinctively Reformed radio ministry, proclaiming the truth of the sovereignty of God.

I assume that those who are listening today are those who profess to be children of God and have the opportunity to know God by attending church and reading the Holy Scriptures. Are you growing in the knowledge of God? And does the knowledge of God preserve you in the midst of a wicked world? Does it preserve you in the way of holiness and truth?

Every child of God who professes to know God must admit that he has a great need to grow in the knowledge of God. We

are always being called to know God better. We see our need of growth in the knowledge of God when we compare ourselves to those in the Scriptures who knew God intimately, and when we think of the powerful effect that that knowledge of God had in their lives. For instance, Joseph. As a young man in the evil world of Egypt he was tempted to sexual impurity, but he maintained his purity and ran away from the temptation. Why? In Genesis 39:9 he said this: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It was the knowledge of God that made him pure.

In Psalm 73: 25, Asaph spoke of the fact that he had, for a while, envied the prosperity of the wicked. But then God brought him to the sanctuary

and gave him to know more of Himself. Asaph, in the midst of a world gone mad after things, learned contentment by knowing God. He says: "And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Knowing God, he was perfectly content with his life.

Or we think of Daniel's friends as they stood in the midst of Babylon and were called to worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar had made. They would not bow down, even at the threat of their life. Why? They said this: "We serve the most high God. And let it be known unto you, O king, we will not bow down to your image, no matter what you do." The knowledge of God preserved them in faithfulness in a wicked world.

We need to grow in the knowledge of God. That knowl-

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edge of God is the most practical, most vital, and most important thing in your life and in mine.

But perhaps you object: "You say that we must grow in knowledge of God, and that we must be active in growing in the knowledge of God. And you even ask what we are doing to grow in the knowledge of God. But isn't it a matter of God's initiative? Isn't knowing God a matter of His grace?"

The answer to that is yes, of course, knowing God is possible only by His grace. He must first come and make Himself known unto you or you cannot know Him in a saving sense. But that grace of God whereby He gives us to know Him is not something mechanical. It is not like inserting a computer chip at the brain stem. Grace is a living power of God, infused into children of God, so that from their heart and mind and will they desire to know Him who hath loved them. That grace of God causes them to seek Him. Psalm 27:8, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face (there is the command: Seek My face, know Me); my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek." Just like a salmon who will die in its efforts to reach the stream where it was born, so the child of God has one great desire implanted by grace in his heart: to know the living God.

But what must we do if we are to grow in the knowledge of God? One's attitude, of course, is the crucial thing in all areas of learning and knowledge. One must desire, one must have the proper spiritual attitude, if one is to grow in the knowledge of God.

There are a number of things that the Scriptures teach us about the true spiritual attitude that we must possess if we are to grow in the knowledge of God, an attitude that we must cultivate.

The first thing is godly sincerity. In Jeremiah 29:13 we read,

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." That is, God has willed that He will reveal Himself to His people only in the way of their sincerely (and by His grace) seeking Him. The spiritual sluggard, the one who is apathetic and indifferent, will not find God. God withholds Himself from those who are indifferent.

Again we read, in Isaiah 29:13:

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men....

God speaks here of the fact that a mere outward, dead, formal seeking after Him will benefit a soul absolutely nothing. God calls us to seek Him from the heart, the heart that He has given, the heart that loves Him.

So the first thing that is necessary if we are to grow in the knowledge of the living God is sincerity. The knowledge of God cannot be appreciated by one who is apathetic and sluggish in his heart.

We read in Proverbs 2:1-3 the following:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding....

Observe the verbs that God has used for the call to action. "Incline thy ear...apply thy heart...cry after knowledge...lift up thy voice...search for it as silver." Then shalt thou know the living

God. God calls us to seek Him in sincerity, godly sincerity. God calls not for part of the heart. God requires all the heart, an undivided heart, to search and to seek Him.

Are you sincere? The sermons that you hear, do they mean nothing? Or do you put your heart into listening to the sermons? Do you want to know God? Do you read the Holy Scriptures in no other way than the way of sincerity? That is the way, first, to know God.

But secondly, the Scriptures reveal to us that the way to know God is the way of humility. We read in Psalm 138:6: "Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off." God reveals Himself to those who are humble and lowly of heart. There is no greater affront to God than a proud heart, a heart that assumes an indifferent position toward Him, a heart that does not fall down in awe before the living God. We read in II Chronicles 7:14:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Again, God says that those who walk in pride, those who walk in conceit—God shall hide His face from them. God reveals Himself only in the way of the grace of humility.

What is humility? One is humble only when God has brought him to a right understanding. Humility is not a false understanding of things. Humility is a true understanding. It is a true understanding of three things: who you are, who God is,

The spiritual sluggard, the one who is apathetic and indifferent, will not find God.

and what God has done. When you know yourself as a fallen, depraved sinner; when by grace you know God, the living and the true God; and when you know by His grace what God's grace has done in giving His Son—then the result is humility.

I must have a right understanding of who I am: sinner; who God is: the living Holy One; and what God has done for me: by mercy saved me in Jesus Christ. A child of God who knows those things cannot be proud.

And God delights in drawing near to the lowly. The world despises humility. The world says, "Don't grovel." But God loves nothing more than drawing near to the contrite heart.

So the way to know God: godly sincerity, and profound humility.

Then there is a third element. That element is purity. We read in Isaiah 59:1, 2:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

There the prophet is measuring sin in terms of the distance it puts between the child of God and his God.

A child of God can never say, "There are no effects, there are no consequences of my sin." No, the prophet says, your sins have hid His face from you.

Sin puts distance between us and God. We read again in Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Jesus is saying that in the way of sin, overt sin, walking in the way of sin, we shall not see God. But walking in the way of purity we shall see God.

It is not true that a person can lie down in sin and get up and return to life as normal. There will be consequences. There must be consequences, so long as God is in His heaven. What about your life? What about purity? What about the hidden things of your heart? What about the music that you listen to? Do you say, "My music, don't criticize my music!"

Especially important here is the call of God to put away pornography and sexual sins. The sexual use of our natures outside of marriage is sin. And it is a sin that, no matter how glamorized today, puts distance between the child of God and his God. In Revelation 14:4 the saints of God are described in terms of their sexual purity. Listen.

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

God's special presence is found in the way of purity, of preserving our temple (our body) pure and holy unto the Lord. And impurity, sexual impurity, is that which robs us of seeing His face. It is that which corrupts. Revelation 17 and 18 describe the Antichrist, the anti-christian powers, as the great whore. Satan knows spiritual dynamics.

So this world is swallowed up with pornography.

Why? Perhaps because no sins so silence the testimony of God and so cause God to withdraw and to give men over to their own darkness as the sins of sexual impurity.

That is true in the world of unbelief. God gives a society over to its filth until at last it stands ripe for judgment. That

is also true in the life of a child of God. Our lives as children of God are precious. They have been purchased by the blood of Christ. We have been saved in order that we might know God's face; in order that we might stand before God; in order that we might see Him in Jesus Christ. Now, child of God, the Scriptures warn us against impurity. No matter how prevalent, no matter how accepted, no matter how pervasive, no matter how harmless, innocent, and accepted it may appear to be, it is a great evil. And it is an evil that does great damage and destruction to the soul.

Have you lost your purity, purity in your heart? God calls you to repent. Bow before the cross of Jesus Christ. That blood of Christ and grace of Christ are able to restore holiness and purity, wash you from evil, forgive you, and give you to walk in the knowledge that you are not your own, but belong body and soul unto your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. God's presence in Jesus Christ gives the blessing of purity. And in that purity is joy. So we may read in Psalm 84: "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." No other earthly thing gives joy so great as to know God in purity.

Are you growing in the knowledge of God? God calls you to grow in the knowledge of Him through godly sincerity, through profound humility, and through true purity. None of these things can be attained of ourselves. So we come to God time after time, in prayer, in the Holy Scriptures, and through the preaching of His word on the Lord's day.

Earnestly we desire to grow in the knowledge of God.



Sin puts distance between us and God.

Hell

As with heaven, hell is represented by two outstanding pictures. They are the grave (*hades* or *sheol*) and a garbage dump called *Gehenna* or valley of Hinnom. Some attempt to escape the existence of hell by noting that these words are used interchangeably in Scripture. But this is as futile and foolish as denying the reality of 'heaven' simply because that word refers also to the firmament and outer-space. Make no mistake, hell is real. And the grave and this garbage dump warn of the eternal terror, shame, darkness, and death that are suffered body and soul in hell, under the just wrath of God against sin, by everyone not reconciled to Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

As an extension of death, the grave is a familiar picture of hell. Death and grave are related, and often mentioned together in Scripture. As heaven is to life, the grave is to death. It is the place of death, one enters it by death, and there death inexorably works its corruption. The grave (hell) is a place—a pit with steep sides, chambers, and gates (Is. 14:15; Prov. 7:27; Matt. 16:18). But there are no windows or decorations. It is a deep abyss wherein is no light—no light of God's love and grace, no glimmerings of natural light, no light of joy and life. Only outer darkness (Matt. 8:12). The grave (hell) is a terrifying, claustrophobic, lonely place. There is no friendship or conversation, as some suppose. Only torment, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Ps. 18:5; 116:3; Luke 16:23).

In hell, one is alone, damned, separated from everything and everyone (Mark 3:29). And none escapes its destruction. The grave (hell) is a powerful, unyielding monster with gaping jaws that swallow up its victims to digest in its belly their beauty, glory, pomp, and life (Is. 5:14; Song 8:6; Jonah 2:2). It is a shameful place where death, having defeated a man, strips him bare, and consumes him (Is. 57:9; Job 26:2; Ps. 49:14). And hell is never satisfied. It is a bottomless pit (Prov. 30:16; Rev. 9:2).

Gehenna is a less familiar but equally significant picture of hell. Gehenna was a deep valley outside Jerusalem, infamous as the place Ahaz and Manasseh established as official worship the burning of covenant children in sacrifice to Molech (Josh. 15:8; II Chron. 28:3; 33:6). Hence it was

also known as Tophet, a reference to the fires that consumed the little ones or the drums beaten to drown out their screams (Is. 30:31-32). To prevent this abomination from reoccurring, godly Josiah defiled the place by making it a garbage dump. There, the rubbish, excrement, animal carcasses, and corpses of criminals were discarded into a reeking, putrefied mass perpetually crawling with worms and smoldering with fire (II Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:33).

Gehenna is the word our Lord used most often for hell. Familiar to His audience, it served as a vivid and extended warning, especially to the complacent and apostates in the church, to "repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." So also today. It emphasizes that hell is the place of lowest shame and eternal torment for all the dung, garbage, vile, and unclean beasts regardless of their place among men. So repent! The kingdom being at hand, hell is near.

When the Lord returns, He will destroy all things, so the pictures of hell give way to the reality (Rev. 20:14). From His kingdom the Lord will first gather, judge without respect of person, then take out the trash. Satan, his brood of vipers, Antichrist, even death and hell He will cast into the lake of fire (Matt. 23:33; Rev. 20:10-14). Also, all others who forget God and reject His Christ—the idolater, blasphemer, Sabbath desecrator, thief, fornicator, murderer, liar, and covetous have no place in His kingdom (Ps. 9:17; Matt. 5:22; 11:23; Prov. 5:5; Eph. 5:5). Objects of God's killing wrath in hell, they are never consumed, their bodies fitted for perpetual destruction in the resurrection unto damnation (John 5:29; Mark 9:44).

Seek Jesus! He alone has the keys of death and hell. Crucified, dead, and buried in the grave, He descended into the deep pit of hell, the belly of that insatiable beast, passed through the darkness of the valley of death, and emerged victorious. Having paid the wages of sin, His soul could not be left in hell nor His body allowed to see corruption (Ps. 16:10). Damned, enduring the shame of hell, suffering its inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and agonies under the wrath of God, He has delivered all who find refuge in Him from the same (L.D. 16). In all my greatest temptations I may, as a believer, be assured of, not hell, but eternal life, joy, light, and glory in His heaven.

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Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (4)

The Postmillennial Interpretation of Revelation 20

The interpretation of Revelation 20, the one passage in Holy Scripture that mentions the millennium, or thousand-year period, is basic to the right understanding of the millennium and, indeed, of the truth of the last things generally. The explanation of the passage by Reformed amillennialism appeared earlier in this treatment of the biblical doctrine of the last things.¹

Here I sketch the interpretation of the passage by the leading spokesmen of postmillennialism in the Reformed tradition. According to the Puritans and their modern disciples, Presbyterian postmillennialists such as J. Marcellus Kik and Loraine Boettner, and the Christian Reconstructionists, who lean heavily on Kik's exegesis of Revelation 20, the millennium of Revelation 20 is a very long period of time, extending (in the judgment of most) from

the ascension of Christ to a time shortly before Christ's coming again.

Like amillennialism, therefore, postmillennialism explains the millennium figuratively, not as a literal period of one thousand years. Indeed, many postmillennialists suppose that the heyday of the millennium—the “golden age” for the church on earth—will last for hundreds of thousands of years prior to the second coming of Christ.

But it is in its explanations of the binding of Satan (vv. 2, 3) and of the reign of the martyr-saints with Christ (v. 4) that postmillennialism differs radically from amillennialism in its interpretation of Revelation 20.

The Binding of Satan

Postmillennialism understands the binding of Satan to be Christ's gradual restricting of Satan's influence upon men and nations throughout this present age until finally at least the vast majority of humans alive in the world are converted to Christ; all nations are “Christianized,” that is, governed by the law of God and influenced by the Spirit of Christ in all their activities; and such evils as war, poverty, and crime are severely curtailed.

The more optimistic postmillennialists suggest that when Satan's binding has been fully realized, even sin and death

will sharply diminish. R. J. Rushdoony promises a “world relatively free of crime, at peace, and men having a long life expectancy.”² Christian Reconstructionist Martin G. Selbrede envisions “voluntary obedience to Christ on a world-wide scale so total that *all rebellion and depravity* have been ‘extinguished.’” Selbrede is certainly right to describe his millennial hope as “unbounded optimism.”³

A curious feature of the postmillennial conception of the binding of Satan is the notion that the binding of Satan is dependent upon the aggressive actions of the church. Postmillennialists charge that Satan's obvious influence over nations and people in our day is the fault of the church. If the church would exert herself, she could accomplish Satan's full binding in the postmillennial understanding of it. Whereas Revelation 20:1 places the chain that binds Satan in the hand of the angel, postmillennialism puts it in the hand of the church.

Unfortunately the Church of to-

¹ *Standard Bearer* 85, no. 15 (May 1, 2009): 343-346; no. 19 (August 2009): 448-450.

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Previous article in this series: February 1, 2010, p. 198.

² R. J. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1977), 2.

³ Martin G. Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* 15 (Winter, 1998): 202, 194. The emphasis is Selbrede's.

day does not realize the power that Christ has given her. Christ has placed in her hands the chain by which she can bind Satan. She can restrain his influence over the nations. But today the Church bemoans the fact that evil is becoming stronger and stronger. She bemoans the fact that the world is coming more and more under the control of the Devil. Whose fault is that? It is the Church. She has the chain and does not have the faith to bind Satan even more firmly. Satan is bound and the Church knows it not! Satan can be bound more firmly and the Church does it not!⁴

Christian Reconstruction likewise condemns the Christian church for the sorry state of a world under the spiritual domination of Satan. Especially if the church would promote the law of God in national and societal life, Satan would soon be completely bound.

The teaching that the coming of the millennial kingdom of Christ in its full glory is being held back by an unfaithful church is yet another instance of the striking formal similarities of postmillennialism to premillennial dispensationalism that I have already noted.⁵ Dispensationalism teaches that the millennial kingdom Christ intended to establish at His first coming was delayed by the unbelief of the Jews. Postmillennialism teaches that the millennial kingdom in the fulness of its power and glory is being delayed by an unfaithful church.

What postmillennial interpretation of the binding of Satan ignores is that the binding of Satan is a present reality, not a future possibility. He *is* bound. He *has* been bound. He has been bound

as tightly and completely as can and need be during this present age. The one who has bound him is an angel from heaven, not the church. The church has many important callings. Binding Satan is not one of them. And, of utmost importance, the binding of Satan concerns one limitation of the devil, and one only: he is not able to deceive the nations, so as to bring about the world-kingdom of Antichrist. His binding has nothing to do with converting a majority of the human race, “Christianizing” the nations, putting an end to wars, diminishing crime, and increasing “material blessings” for the human race.

The Reign of the “Souls”

The reign of the “souls” with Christ of Revelation 20:4-6, according to postmillennialism, coincides with the gradual binding of Satan. Throughout the present age, as Satan is increasingly bound, the church progressively gains influence in society and power over the nations until at last, in the heyday of the millennium, she will have dominion—*earthly* dominion—over all the nations of the world. By the word of God (for Christian Reconstruction especially the law of God), the church and her members will control politics, civic justice, public morality, economics, education, the media, entertainment, and the arts—*worldwide*. Coming is a universal, earthly kingdom of Christ, prior to the bodily return of Jesus Christ. This will be the mediatorial, or Messianic, kingdom in its fullest and final manifestation. Leading postmillennial theologians teach that this glorious manifestation of the kingdom of Christ may last hundreds of thousands of years before Christ returns.

This splendid earthly king-

dom will be the victory of Christ in the world. Apart from this kingdom, Christ would be defeated.

For this kingdom, the postmillennialists ardently hope—as ardently as the dispensationalists hope for their earthly kingdom.

When this kingdom holds sway over all nations and peoples, the Christian Reconstructionists intend to implement once again the civil and judicial laws of the Old Testament, which ordered the

national life of Israel. Hence, the name “theonomy” for the doctrine of Christian Reconstruction. “Theonomy” means ‘law of God’ with reference specifically to the civil and judicial laws of Old Testament Israel. Christian judges likely will sentence Sabbath-breakers to be stoned to death according to the Old Testament law of Numbers 15:32-36.

The First Resurrection

Basic to this postmillennial explanation of the reign of the saints with Christ is its interpretation of the “first resurrection,” in Revelation 20:5, 6, as regeneration. Postmillennialism denies that the first resurrection is the translation of the souls of elect believers into heavenly life and glory at the moment of death. It is essential to the postmillennial explanation of the reign of the saints, as to its understanding of the millennium, that the first resurrection be interpreted as regeneration. For only then can the reign of the saints take place *on the earth*. If the first resurrection is, in fact, the translation of the souls of believers at death, the reign of the saints of Revelation 20:4-6 occurs *in heaven as part of the communion of the saints, in their souls, with the reigning Christ at the right hand of God*.

The church has many important callings. Binding Satan is not one of them.

⁴ J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 196.

⁵ *Standard Bearer* 86, no. 2 (October 15, 2009): 34, 35.

And this would mean the collapse of the entire postmillennial conception of a coming “golden age” for the church in history, at least on the basis of Revelation 20.

Kik, therefore, calls the interpretation of the “first resurrection,” in verse five, as the spiritual regeneration of God’s people in this world the “key” to a right understanding of the millennium of Revelation 20.⁶

Postmillennial, Christian Reconstructionist (to be redundant) David Chilton does not greatly exaggerate when he judges that he can dispose of amillennialism by refuting its interpretation of the first resurrection as the translation of believers into heaven in their soul at death.

We can dispose of the amillennial position right away, by pointing out the obvious: this is a *resurrection*, a *rising again from the dead*. Dying and going to heaven is wonderful, but, for all its benefits, it is not a resurrection. This passage cannot be a description of the state of disembodied saints in heaven.⁷

With regard to John’s seeing “souls” reigning with Christ, postmillennialists point out that “souls” can refer to ‘persons,’ or to ‘lives.’ Here, they say, the reference is to regenerated persons reigning on earth in both a body and a soul, especially during the time of the “golden age.”

This postmillennial interpretation of the reigning of the saints, as seen by the apostle in Revelation 20:4-6, is exposed as false by the conclusive testimony of the passage that the reign of the saints follows their *death*—their *physical* death. It is not, therefore, a reign on this earth, but a reign in heaven. The con-

clusive testimony is not only that John sees “souls,” in distinction from “men,” or “believers,” or “saints,” that is, men and women living earthly life in the body, although this deliberate mention of “souls” is significant. Earlier, referring to the same persons in virtually the same language, John located “the souls of them that were slain for the word of God” “under the altar” (Rev. 6:9). He distinguished these souls (and their abode in heaven) from their brothers who still must be killed, as the saints in heaven had been, by the wicked who “dwell on the earth” (Rev. 6:10, 11).

But the conclusive testimony is that John sees “souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus.” These persons, who have been killed by the anti-christian world-power for their faithful confession of Jesus Christ, lived and reigned with Christ. Souls of those who have been beheaded do not exercise earthly dominion in history.

That the souls who reign with Christ are the saints who have been taken up to heaven at death is confirmed by the mention of the “second death” in verse six. The second death is hell, as verse fourteen establishes: “The lake of fire [is] the second death.” The first death is physical death. Corresponding to these two forms of death are two forms of resurrection, or deliverance from death. The second is the resurrection of the body into immortality. The first is the translation of the soul of the believer at the moment of physical death.

Contrary to the emphatic, but ungrounded, denial of the postmillennialists, the deliverance of the believer in his soul at death is indeed resurrection. The soul of the regenerated Christian in earthly life is corrupted by sin as much as is his body. Besides, his soul is earthy—completely adapted to living earthly life in this world and completely un-

suited to living heavenly life in the other world, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. In addition, as corrupted by sin (as corrupted as is the body) and as guilty of all kinds of transgressions of thought, will, and passions, the soul of the believer is fully deserving of the punishment of eternal death at the moment of its separation from the body in death. That Christ perfectly purifies the soul of depravity, transforms it so that it is now fit to live heavenly life, and takes the soul into the eternal life of heaven at the moment of the believer’s death is resurrection—real life for the believer out of real death.

The Intermediate State

Revelation 20:4-6 describes the “intermediate state” of elect believers.⁸

So clearly does the passage speak of the intermediate state that Benjamin B. Warfield, postmillennialist though he was, acknowledged that Revelation 20:4-6 teaches the intermediate state, and may not, therefore, be appealed to by postmillennialism on behalf of a reign of the church on earth. Recognizing that the “souls of them that had been beheaded” are “disembodied souls,” Warfield concluded, concerning the millennium of Revelation 20, particularly verses four through six:

The picture that is brought before us here is, in fine, the picture of the “intermediate state”—of the saints of God gathered in heaven away from the confused noise and garments bathed in blood

⁸ See my treatment of the intermediate state, with specific reference to Revelation 20:4-6, in previous articles in this series: *Standard Bearer* 80, no. 9 (February 1, 2004): 210-213; 82, no. 3 (November 1, 2005): 64-67; 82, no. 10 (February 15, 2006): 225-228; 82, no. 20 (September 1, 2006): 465-468; 85, no. 3 (November 1, 2008): 57-60; 85, no. 6 (December 15, 2008): 132-134.

⁶ Kik, *Eschatology of Victory*, 179.

⁷ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Reconstruction Press, 1985), 196. The emphasis is Chilton’s.

that characterize the war upon earth in order that they may securely await the end. The thousand years, thus, is the whole of this present dispensation, which again is placed before us in its entirety, but looked at now relatively not to what is passing on earth but to what is enjoyed "in Paradise."⁹

He added: "The millennium of the Apocalypse is the blessedness of the saints who have gone away from the body to be at home with the Lord."¹⁰

⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 649. Warfield found evidence for a future "golden age" elsewhere in Scripture, especially the Old Testament prophecies and Revelation 19:11-21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 662.


The Earthly Victory of Christ

Most postmillennialists, however, differ with Warfield. In the light of their exegesis of Revelation 20, particularly the binding of Satan and the reign with Christ of believing members of the church, as sketched above, most postmillennialists view the millennium as the history of this present age destined to climax in the future in a long period of time during which the church will enjoy almost total earthly victory over her enemies.

The church shall have dominion over land and sea/earth's remotest regions shall her empire be/they that wilds inhabit shall their off'rings bring/kings shall render tribute/nations kiss her ring.

This earthly victory of His church will be Christ's supreme triumph, according to postmillennialism, and the full and final glory of His kingdom.

In jarring conflict with this giddy prospect of Christ's victory in history is the sobering conclusion of the vision of Revelation 20 concerning the thousand years. "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations...and they...compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city" (vv. 7-9).

How does postmillennialism explain this overthrow of the dominion of Christ and His church at the end of the millennium and history? And how does postmillennialism harmonize this worldwide revolt against Christ's kingship at the end with postmillennialism's conviction that Christ must have an earthly triumph in history? Does not this revolt represent, for postmillennialism, the defeat of Christ—the *decisive* defeat of Christ? 

God-Fearing Pilgrims

One way in which the word of God describes us as pilgrims is by referring to us as "sojourners." We are those who are passing the time of our sojourning here on earth (I Pet. 1:17). We are simply traveling through this world toward our heavenly home.

A sojourner is someone who is away from home. He is either visiting or living in a foreign land. He is among strangers.

He feels very much out of place. The customs, the way of life, the houses, the food, the language—they're all foreign to him, very different from what he's used to. He is an alien in that land and is usually eager to return to his homeland again.

That is what the believer experiences concerning life here on earth. He confesses: I am a stranger and a sojourner in this world, as all my fathers were! (Ps. 39:12). We are traveling in a foreign land. We do not hold citizenship papers here. We do not have a permanent home. We are simply passing the time of

our sojourning. We are aliens and exiles who have no intention of staying here. We plan to move on and live elsewhere, for our spiritual eyes are focused on life in our heavenly home, the city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

But how should we pass the time of our sojourning here on earth? What principle should guide us in spending and using up the time we have here below?

Since we are sojourners, perhaps we could conduct ourselves as tourists do when visiting a foreign land. Then we would

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race around and take in as many sights and experiences of earthly life as possible. We would be busy creating lasting memories of earthly pleasure and fun. We would record our experiences so that we can relive them, and even share them with others. And we would purchase to ourselves many souvenirs (earthly possessions). These we would treasure, clinging to them as though it were possible to take them with us to our permanent home in heaven.

Or perhaps we would take this approach. Since we are likely to be here for a while, then let's at least settle in and make ourselves at home. We ought to learn the language and culture and customs of the world. We should teach these to our children. We should try to make lasting friendships.

Sadly, we often do these very things. Often we sinfully approach life as the ungodly do. "Live it up," they say. "Take it all in! Accumulate wealth and possessions! Attain all the earthly success you can! Make a name for yourself! And be sure to indulge in whatever earthly pleasure is available and desirable—let nothing get in your way! This earthly life is all that there is, so make the most of it before it's over!"

But what then should be the guiding principle of our pilgrim life? How should we pass our time here on earth? The Lord's word is: "Pass the time of your sojourning here *in fear*" (1 Pet. 1:17).

What is this fear? Ecclesiastes, in a strikingly similar passage, tells us it is the fear of God.

Solomon, who wrote that book, speaks as an elderly grandfather would to his grandchildren. By this time in his life, he has pursued everything one possibly can: riches, pleasures, work, wisdom, goals, joys, sci-

ence, knowledge, success, possessions, and wine, women, and song. And he tells us it is all, of itself, vain. None of it has lasting value. None of it satisfies. None of it is worthy of being pursued.

That leads to the closing words of the book, where Solomon states (Eccl. 12:13): "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

All our time on earth must be governed by the fear of God. Every minute and hour of every day. And every week and month of every year. The fear of God must characterize us in every circumstance and experience. We are not here to please ourselves. We are not here to create lasting memories. We are not here to heap up earthly treasures. We are in this world to fear God, and to do so every moment of our earthly sojourn.

To fear God does not mean fright. We do not go through life afraid that God might punish us, afraid we might lose His love, afraid that after all we might be abandoned by Him and thus not arrive in our heavenly home. We are not terrified of God, expecting that at any moment He might suddenly strike us down or send a great disaster because we have sinned. The wicked are, and rightly so, for they do not have Christ. We, however, belong to Him who has loved us unto death and has removed the wrath of God and thus all reason for this kind of fear.

The basic idea of the fear of

God is reverence. It is respect and honor for Him who is worthy of all praise. To reverence God we must know Him. When we know Him, we are filled with wonder at who He is, and at what He has done for us. We are amazed by all this. We stand in awe of God and of His works.

There are ample opportunities, every day, to be amazed at our God.

Consider the creation that surrounds us, brought into existence by a spoken word. And even though it is now under the curse of sin, it is still displaying the beauty of its Creator. Consider, and stand in awe of God's almighty power and glory.

Consider His providential hand in your life. His hand upholds and guides you so that all things serve your eternal good, even the great distresses of life, and the trek through the valley of the shadow of death. Consider, and stand in awe of His wisdom and goodness.

Consider His work at the cross of Christ. There He sent His Son to hell so that you and I will never have to face one moment of the wrath we deserve. Consider, and stand in awe of His marvelous grace and love.

Consider and meditate upon His word. See therein the beauty and sovereignty and grace and love of God. Consider that this God is your God. Consider and fear.

When we have such fear, it will affect our life. A sense of awe for God will mean that we do all things as before His face. We will live for Him.

The child of God who is mindful of and in awe of God's almighty power will be humble before Him. The believer who

The Christian who is amazed by the perfect wisdom of God, who makes not one mistake in all He does and sends, will gladly accept and submit to God's will in his life.

reveres God because of His holiness will hate and turn from sin. The Christian who is amazed by the perfect wisdom of God, who makes not one mistake in all He does and sends, will gladly accept and submit to God's will in his life. The saint who is aware of the unfathomable grace of God toward him will always and forever be grateful. The child of God who is in awe of the goodness of God in making him an heir of eternal life will not love the world and all that is in it, but

will keep himself unspotted and detached from it because he has in view his home in heaven.

We do well to examine whether the fear of God is governing us. Who can deny that it is not always there as it ought to be?


Why do we so often depart from the ways of God? Because the fear of God is not before our minds.

Why do we at times pass the time of our earthly sojourn focused on ourselves and on the things here below? Because the

fear of God is not governing our lives.

Why do we complain and moan about the ways in which God leads us? Because God is not in all our thoughts.

Why does our life frequently seem so empty and vain, without true meaning and worth? Because we are not living it in the fear of God.

Spend the time of your sojourning on this earth in fear. Fear God, for this is the whole duty of man! 

Robert Morrison (1782 – 1834)

The history of the spread of the gospel is a fascinating one. It is the account of God raising up brave, gifted individuals and using them to penetrate heathen cultures and customs by the proclamation of the gospel. Robert Morrison, prepared by God to spread the gospel to China, was one of these men.

Morrison was born January 5, 1782, the youngest of eight children, to parents who attended a Scottish Presbyterian church. While in his teen years, he was apprenticed to his father, a manufacturer of wooden forms used in shoemaking. By the age of 19, Morrison felt compelled to the ministry and prepared for it by studying the Bible and learning biblical languages in his spare

time. As he read articles in the mission magazines of the day, Morrison became increasingly interested in ministering to foreign nations.

Opposition from his parents, especially his mother, prevented him from acting on his intentions. He had promised his mother that as long as she was living, he would not leave her, to go abroad. He cared for her in her illnesses until she died in 1804 and then applied to the London Missionary Society (LMS) for foreign service. He was accepted and began training even though his family and friends continued to oppose his desire to go overseas. They saw in him tremendous gifts and encouraged him to pursue some of the many opportunities available for ministry at home. But, while family members might have called Morrison stubborn, God was working in him a steadfastness for foreign missions.

For a while, Morrison was not clear as to where he should go. He struggled between Africa and China and prayed that God would station him in that part of the missionary field where the difficulties were greatest and, to all human appearances, the most insurmountable. That is not a prayer that most of us would be so willing to offer to our heavenly Father. But Morrison desired to be spent by God in the service of promoting the gospel. After his professors encouraged him to use his linguistic gifts in China, Morrison made contact with a Chinese living in London who began to teach him the Chinese language. He studied a Latin/Chinese dictionary along with portions of the New Testament that had already been translated by the Jesuits.

Morrison was ordained in 1807 by the Scottish church for mission work in China under the auspices of the LMS. Ob-

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stacles continued, however, in that the society desired to send two men together, but there was no one to accompany him. In addition, all the ships going to China were from the East India Company, who refused to transport missionaries. Finally, he was sent alone on a ship that was sailing to Canton, China via the United States. On his voyage he had a conversation with the owner of the ship, who said: "And so, Mr. Morrison, you really expect to make an impression on the idolatry of the great Chinese Empire?" Morrison replied, appropriately: "No sir, but I expect God will."

Morrison reached Canton in September of 1807 after a voyage that lasted nearly seven months. Once he began his work, he encountered many obstacles. It was nearly impossible to study the Chinese language with the intent of being involved in evangelism in any way. It was difficult to find a place to live or people who would assist him. God, in His providence, eventually led Morrison to two Roman Catholic converts who agreed to tutor him. These men were so afraid of getting caught that they carried vials of poison at all times to use in case they were captured. They would rather die than suffer at the hands of the Chinese authorities.

In spite of the loneliness and lack of support, Morrison made good progress in the first couple of years. The East India Trading Society was so impressed with the Chinese/English dictionary and grammar guide Morrison produced that they offered him a lucrative position as their official translator. Knowing that this would be the only way that he could continue in China, Morrison took the position and reluctantly became one of the first "tent-making" missionaries. Morrison translated the Bible and many pieces of Christian litera-

ture into the Chinese language. He also published a number of important works, including *A View of China, for Philological Purposes*, which contained an outline of Chinese chronology, geography, government, religion, and customs, designed for those who were studying the Chinese language.

William Marshman, one of William Carey's colleagues in Serampore, India, had also started translating the Bible to Chinese about this time. Marshman's version was finished more quickly, but Morrison was determined to have a more complete and accurate product. Morrison took the time to revise his translation thoroughly before printing, and consequently his translation was more widely used by the Chinese and became known as the most significant.

When his translation of the New Testament was made public in 1815, East India Company officials called for him to be immediately dismissed. Though his future in China was uncertain for a time, Morrison's work as translator had made him so indispensable to the company that they never carried out their threat.

While living in China, Morrison became acquainted with Mary Morton, the daughter of a doctor who was also working there. They married and were blessed with three children, one of whom died in infancy. The East India Company restricted women from living in Canton, so Morrison had to leave his family in nearby Macao, a Portuguese colony. He traveled back and forth between the two locations until Mary's poor health required her and her two small children to move to England. After six years of being separated from his wife and children, Morrison was reunited when they returned to China in the summer of 1821. Sadly, his

wife died a short time later. The following year Morrison made the difficult decision to send his twelve-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son back to England, so that they could be brought up in the church and taught the fear of the Lord.

Because of the difficulties of bringing more missionaries to China, the LMS turned their focus to Malacca, where William Milne and his family resided and where a Christian college had been established. By the early 1820s a group of 60 Chinese were meeting regularly for worship in Malacca. This work became the launching point for mission work through Southeast Asia, including Singapore. Some of the believers from Malacca later moved to Singapore and were instrumental in helping establish Christianity in that city. The first Protestant missionary was sent to Singapore in 1819, the year that Singapore was founded. Rev. Samuel Milton stepped ashore on October 25, sent by the LMS.

Morrison also worked in Singapore. In 1823 he met with Thomas Stamford Raffles about the possibility of establishing a college to promote the gospel. While there was enthusiastic support initially, Raffles unexpectedly had to leave Singapore and no one else was willing to push for the project. To Morrison's great disappointment, the plan never materialized.

Morrison returned to England in 1824 for his first furlough after 17 years of labor in Asia. While it took seven years for his first convert to be baptized, by this time a small church had been established. Many more Christians were believed to be in the area, but, out of fear of persecution, refused to make themselves known by attending Bible studies or worship services.

Morrison had become recognized for his work throughout Southeast Asia, and when he ar-

rived in England he unexpectedly found himself to be a celebrity. He was in high demand for lectures and conferences. He spent much time promoting foreign missions and recruiting missionaries for work in the lands he had visited. During his furlough he met and married his second wife, Elizabeth Armstrong, and returned to China in 1826 with her and his two children. Morrison was blessed with four more sons with his second wife.

While he continued translating and publishing much Christian literature, the majority of his time was spent as negotiator between the Chinese and the English, settling disputes over trade issues. Then troubles arose on both political and religious fronts. Due to political tension between China and England, war resulted. The conflict required Morrison to send his wife and younger children tearfully back to England in 1832. The Roman Catholic Church became increasingly incensed at his work, and in 1833 refused to allow the printing of any of his transla-

tions. Many faithful saints still tried to get his literature published, but it became much more difficult. Then, before he had even received word of the safe arrival of his family in England, Morrison died in the arms of his son at the age of 52, after a bout of sickness. His death providentially coincided with the forced departure of the East India Company from China.

A study of the life of Robert Morrison gives occasion for at least three observations. First, the opposition he faced in China was less from the heathen than from Rome. While this shocked and discouraged Morrison, we too must expect our chief opposition to come from the apostate church. Second, the history of Morrison's life stresses the importance of a godly upbringing and parents who encourage their children to read good religious literature. It also is an inspiration to missionaries to write regular newsletters and mission related articles and to parents to make certain that their children read them. Finally, the history

sets forth the impact that a person can have as a witness for God while laboring full-time in a secular occupation. Morrison was employed full-time with the East India Trading Society almost the entire time he was in China. Nevertheless he accomplished so much for the sake of the gospel that he is known as a significant figure in the history of missions to China and South-east Asia.

The prayer that Morrison uttered was answered. God gave him the grace to persevere in one of the most difficult situations ever faced by a Protestant missionary. There were not more than a handful of converts when he died, but God worked through him a beginning. Morrison was able to write:

There is now in Canton a state of society, in respect of Chinese, totally different from what I found in 1807. Chinese scholars, missionary students, English presses and Chinese Scriptures, with public worship of God, have all grown up since that period.



All Around Us

Rev. Nathan Langerak

■ Heartwarming...

I must confess that in reading *World* magazine I usually skip the movie reviews. I am amazed that in a magazine that touts its Christian credentials there are several pages of movie reviews. Usually, with euphonic caveats to be discerning, *World* recommends such for the entertainment of its ostensibly Christian readership.

The very presence of these reviews demonstrates that the

prophet Herman Hoeksema was right in his warning that common grace is a massive triple breach in the walls of the antithesis that separate the church from the world. It also demonstrates how thoroughly the leaven of common grace has worked itself through the churches. No one even questions this in *World*. Instead of having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and reproving them (Eph. 5:12), *World* consistently reviews them, recommends them, and promotes them to its readers. The antithesis between the church—and *World*—

and the world with respect to entertainment has been thoroughly demolished by common grace.

However, the movie review by Megan Basham of *The Blind Side* caught my eye. Its appeal had to do with *World's* making the story of Michael Oher (pronounced OAR) that underlies this movie the cover story of its November 21 issue. The magazine evidently agrees with Ms. Basham's assessment of the movie.

The Blind Side is about Michael Oher, a rookie left-tackle for the Baltimore Ravens professional football team. A kid from

Rev. Langerak is pastor of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois.

a dilapidated housing-project in Memphis, son of a crack addict, Michael was picked up by Leigh Anne Touhy one night as he walked alongside the road in the cold.

Taking the Good Samaritan example to heart, Bible-believing Leigh Anne brings Michael... home, offers him a meal and place to sleep, and eventually, along with the rest of the Touhys, begins to see him as one of the family.... The rest is recent history: Oher went on to college at Ole Miss, made the dean's list, and was a first-round pick in the 2009 NFL draft.

Megan Basham's glowing review says the "emotionally uplifting" movie is:

Enriching and pro-Christian... heart-warming.... After all, it's a movie about the best in humanity and how, if those who are blessed with financial and spiritual resources reach out and share those blessings, they can change the course of someone's life for good.

Sandra Bullock, who plays Leigh Anne, says about her, "I've finally met someone who practices but doesn't preach," by which she means, "does not give me a lecture about how to live my life." Notice that it is not practice and preach. It is practices, *but doesn't* preach. We would presume this is also true of her movie, from which she will no doubt garner millions from viewers who are drawn to this inoffensive practicing without preaching and who will recognize it as one of those "good" movies to which they can take the whole family or which they can rent to watch with their children at home.

Leigh Anne has only one negative criticism of the movie. Being an interior decorator, she did not particularly like the decorations on the mantel of her cin-

ematic house. About the success of the movie, she says, "[God] has a plan for this movie and it is bigger than we are."

The Blind Side, then, is regarded as pro-Christian, heart-warming, and emotionally uplifting. It is a movie about the best in humanity. God has a plan for this movie. And certainly in it you will have no preaching—Hollywood's version of Jesus' parable of the "Good Samaritan."

Assuming that Megan Basham is competent as a "Christian [film] critic," and that her assessment of the movie is correct, the film is another subtle teacher of lies like the idols of Habakkuk's day (Hab. 2:18). What it teaches is not the heart-breaking and repentance-working gospel, but the "heart-warming" and "emotionally-uplifting" doctrine of Hollywood. There is none of what the actress disparagingly calls "preaching"—no lectures about how to live your life. There is no teaching of the truth about the very worst of humanity—incapable of any good and inclined to all evil—but Hollywood's teaching about the "best in humanity."

And while the Touhys certainly took a poor and abandoned boy into their home, the one who receives the praise and thanksgiving in this movie is not Jesus Christ, but "humanity" and, particularly, the Touhys with their "newfound fame." The movie is not a story of God's grace that saved us and delivered us through Jesus Christ from our sins and this present evil world, but a story about the best in humanity.

Besides, deliverance from being a poor, abandoned, impenitent Sabbath-desecrator to being a rich, influential, and famous impenitent Sabbath-desecrator is not much of a deliverance. But it's Hollywood's deliverance, and it sells—especially to undiscerning viewers.

■ Incapable of These Things

Christian film critic Megan Basham—and *World*—ought to turn to the *Chicago Tribune* and read about Mr. Richardson. Mr. Richardson is a family man. He is an educated man. He holds down a steady job as a mall security trainer. By all accounts, while he was in the U.S. Navy he served his country honorably as a petty officer.

In August, according to the *Chicago Tribune* article "Mom Defends Son Accused of Being A Serial Rapist," Mr. Richardson was arrested in Arlington Heights and indicted on 23 counts of rape, burglary, and assault committed in the San Diego area between June 2000 and February 2001. He faces up to 225 years in prison if convicted on all charges (<http://www.chicagobreakingnews.com/2009/08/mom-defends-son-accused-of-being-serial-rapist.html>).

It is not so much the facts of the crimes with which he is charged—they are vicious—or the scope of his alleged crimes—23 counts over 10 months—or the damage that he wreaked in the lives of his alleged victims—it is great—that grips and appalls the reader. There have been others. There have been others who committed crimes of this magnitude. There have been others who wreaked far greater damage in the lives of their victims. What grips the discerning reader is the *defense* that his mother gives when asked about the arrest of her son:

I can't even imagine him being capable of the things they say he did.... This is a family man. This is an educated man.

This is what disturbed the writers of the story, as the title of their article indicates. It is this that disturbed those who read and

commented on the story. As one reviewer wrote,

I don't know what to think anymore. Even my catholic upbringing didn't give me a compass to abstractly figure out news reports.

This ought to give the Reformed reader pause.

The reviewer who could not make sense of the news report of a mother who defended her son from heinous charges by saying that he was "not capable" of these things had that problem because the reviewer's "catholic upbringing" denies the one biblical truth that can explain this disturbing news report. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 2 and 3, I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor and I am incapable of any good and inclined to all wickedness, except I be regenerated by the Spirit. That truth Rome and all who teach common grace deny.

Total depravity explains Mr. Richardson's disturbing crimes. It is true of educated men and uneducated men; it is true of family men and non-family men; it is true of all men and women by nature.

And this means that man is capable of all sorts of wickedness. He is not incapable of these things, but, indeed, very capable of them.

This was David's conclusion when he was searching for an explanation of his sins of committing adultery with the wife of Uriah and then murdering him with the sword of the Ammonites: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5).

This is the believer's confession about his own nature, a nature that he still possesses and against which he fights by grace all his life long. This explains all the vicious things that he finds

yet within himself. In the knowledge of this truth, he hears the balm of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. In this deliverance he rejoices.

■ Crisis in Counseling

About this healing balm, Carl R. Trueman, professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, writes in his article, "The Therapy of the Word." In the January 2010 issue of *New Horizons*, the official publication of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Trueman states, "Over the last decade, one of the growth industries within the church has been that of counseling." Specifically, Carl Trueman is interested in biblical counseling: "Individual Christians have specific problems; [biblical] counseling seeks to address those problems by applying biblical principles."

The fact that the editors of *New Horizons* felt the need to devote an entire issue to biblical counseling demonstrates that they agree with Carl Trueman's analysis that there has been a "veritable explosion in interest in the area over recent years."

Daniel Patterson, minister in the OPC, and Alan Strange, Professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, in the issue's lead article, "Counseling and Secular Psychology," explain the kind of biblical counseling they promote. They make the strong claim: "Many biblical counselors have too often stressed the antithesis in a way that tends, functionally, to downplay or deny common grace." By this they also downplay the contributions of secular psychologists to the field of biblical counseling. They then make an impassioned plea for counseling that "accounts for common grace and the antithesis,"

a counseling that takes into account "the best insights of psychology" because, as they tell us, "If we receive any good, then, from secular psychology, we do so because of God's common grace."

[Common grace] reminds us that unbelievers are not as bad in practice as they are in principle, [because] God...in his common grace, both restrains sin in the unbeliever and permits him, at least in a measure, to exercise the natural gifts with which God has endowed him.

They quote authoritatively Cornelius Van Til, late professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary:

In principle [the unregenerate] is hostile to God. But he cannot carry through this principle completely. He is restrained by God from doing so.... The forces of creative power implanted in him are to some extent released by God's common grace.

They also cite Calvin from his *Institutes* 2.2.15, 16, but ignore what he says just a few paragraphs later that in spiritual things the greatest geniuses of the world are "blinder than moles!" (*Institutes* 2.2.18).

Patterson and Strange promote, then, not the biblical counseling based on the antithesis, which is the view that the Bible "is the sole and sufficient authority for the Christian counselor in his quest to understand those he counsels," but a biblical counseling based on common grace and the antithesis.

Because common grace and the antithesis are entirely opposed to one another and cannot exist side by side, the antithesis always loses in this kind of counseling. It will shortly be a counseling based only on common grace. Furthermore, since, according to Strange and Patterson, counseling is "an extension of the

pulpit ministry," there also must be a pulpit ministry that takes into account common grace.

The massive increase in the popularity of biblical counseling fuels Carl Trueman's article, in which he asks some provocative questions:

Is this current Christian fascination with counseling simply the priorities of the world around dressed up in a Christian idiom: And what does this say about the nature of the church?... Does the rise in biblical counseling, and the growth in the number of biblical counselors, signal a crisis in confidence, not simply in the pulpit, but in the Word of God to achieve its purpose?... Is it perhaps the case that fewer people would need counseling

if more people actually listened prayerfully to what their pastors were telling them from the pulpit every Sunday morning?

Provocative questions! But!

Perhaps the people *are* listening to their pastors. Perhaps they hear off the pulpit that God's common grace restrains sin in the heart of the unregenerate and enables the unregenerate to do much good in the sight of God. Perhaps they hear that "the very best in humanity" is the fruit of God's common grace. Having heard this, they and their children imbibe deeply the "priorities of the world around" and "dress [them] up in a Christian idiom." They listen to a "Christian film critic's" glowing review

of a typical Hollywood story of redemption from poverty and neglect to riches and fame as "pro-Christian," and "emotionally uplifting." They attend the movie or rent it to view at home with their children.

Now, instead of desiring the preaching of the gospel that breaks hearts by the truth that they—educated and civilized—are incapable of any good and inclined to all evil, except they are regenerated, a regeneration that calls them out of the world to stand over against the world reproving its unfruitful works, they want their hearts warmed by a story about "the best in humanity"—a story like *The Blind Side*.



Report of Classis East

January 13-14, 2010
First Protestant
Reformed Church
Grand Rapids

Classis East met in regular session on January 13-14, 2010 at First PRC-Grand Rapids. Each church was represented by two delegates; Rev. J. Slopesma chaired this session of Classis. This was a busy session of Classis, which required two days of deliberations.

Classis received a protest from a consistory in Classis West regarding the decisions Classis took in the matter of the resignation and dismissal of Rev. Nathan Brummel.

Classis upheld this protest in most of its aspects. Classis declared that in the decisions taken at its September 2009 meeting it erred in the following matters (grounds are summarized): 1) Classis erred in

informing the churches that Rev. N. Brummel was "dismissed per his request." The ground given was that this was not factually correct inasmuch as Cornerstone PRC transferred the ministerial certificate to another denomination; 2) Classis erred in receiving without admonition the decision of Cornerstone PRC to transfer the membership papers of Rev. N. Brummel and his family to another denomination. The ground given was that it is long-standing practice of the PRC not to transfer papers to another denomination but to send dismissal papers; 3) Classis erred in receiving without admonition the decision of Cornerstone PRC to transfer the ministerial certificate of Rev. N. Brummel to another denomination, on the grounds that there is no evidence that this has ever been done and that the ministerial certificate of dismissal and testimonial applies only to the

transfer of ministers within the denomination or sister churches; 4) Classis erred in receiving the decision of Cornerstone PRC to transfer the ministerial credentials and membership to another denomination without Classis inquiring into whether this was done with the appropriate admonition. The grounds given were that Rev. N. Brummel should have been admonished about his responsibility to uphold the vows he made in the PRC at his confession of faith, at the time of accepting the call to Cornerstone PRC, and at his subsequent installation into office. Further, as a member of the PRC, Rev. N. Brummel should have been admonished about the dangers to himself and his family by the doctrinal errors officially held by the denomination to which he requested transfer.

Classis dealt further with this protest by declaring that Classis East did not err when

it treated the matter of Rev. N. Brummel without the advice and concurrence of the delegates *ad examina* from Classis West. There is no historical precedent for requiring their presence, nor is there an article in the Church Order that explicitly requires their approbation. In the case of Rev. N. Brummel, the change of ministerial status was effected by Rev. Brummel, not the denomination, when he requested transfer of his credentials. Classis further decided not to admonish Rev. Brummel nor send a notice of the errors recorded above to Rev. Brummel, since he is no longer under Classis' jurisdiction. The consistories of Classis East and Classis West have been notified of these decisions.

Grace PRC informed the Classis of its decisions regarding the ministerial status of Rev. Mitchell Dick. Grace had informed the churches of his leaving the denomination. His membership, and that of his family, were sent to his home. The Grace consistory then drew up a "Ministerial Certificate of Dismissal," which was sent to his home. Classis approved the actions of Grace's consistory relative their decisions to acknowledge that Rev. Dick's request for transfer was in fact a resignation from the ministry in the PRC, to handle this matter immediately without waiting for a meeting of Classis, and to approve the Ministerial Certificate of Dismissal that was sent to Rev. Dick's home. Classis expressed its disapproval of Grace's decision to treat this matter without the advice and approval of the Classical Committee of Classis East. Dismissal and transfer of ministers within the denomination require classis' approval; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that this would also be done for a minister who is dismissed from the denomination.

This was the procedure followed in prior cases involving dismissal. The present cases before the Classis demonstrate the wisdom of following this practice. Classis further decided to instruct its Classical Committee to inquire into whether Grace gave appropriate admonition to Rev. Dick.

Grace PRC also requested that Classis issue an apology to Rev. Dick for dealing publicly with his ineffectiveness as the pastor of Grace. An apology was approved with the request that the Stated Clerk send the apology of Classis to Rev. Dick.

Classis did not treat the report of the Study Committee regarding the proper procedure to follow when a Protestant Reformed minister leaves the denomination for another denomination. Rather, it appointed a new study committee to give advice on this matter in light of the decisions taken by this Classis. This new committee is to report at the May 2010 session of Classis.

Classis adopted the recommendation of its Study Committee to express disapproval of the overture of Faith PRC to reorganize the denomination into three classes, on the ground that the situation in our churches makes restructuring inadvisable at this time. The Study Committee gave statistics about the current and future availability of pastors and the potential of higher costs for three classes.

Voting for synodical delegates to Synod 2010 resulted in the following: *MINISTERS: Primi:* G. Eriks, C. Haak, K. Koole, J. Slopsema, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* A. denHartog, W.

Langerak, J. Laning, A. Lanning, A. Spriensma; *ELDERS: Primi:* D. Doezeema, D. Kregel, W. Koops, G. Kuiper, W. Pipe; *Secundi:* N. Brower, J. Engelsma, R. Faber, J. Kalsbeek, D. Schipper.

Rev. J. Slopsema was elected to a three-year term as *primus* delegate *ad examina*, Rev. W. Langerak to a three-year term as a *secundus* delegate, and Rev. A. denHartog to a one-year *secundus* term to finish the term of Rev. R. Kleyn. Rev. K. Koole was elected to serve a three-year term on the Classical Committee; church visitors selected were Revs. K. Koole and R. VanOverloop, with Revs. C. Haak and J. Laning as alternates.

Classical appointments were approved for Byron Center, Cornerstone, Holland, and Trinity. Classis West has been asked to help with the supply to Cornerstone.

Classis also is requesting Southeast PRC, the calling church for Synod 2010, to seek the approval of Classis West for changing the starting dates of the synod from June 8, 2010 to June 15, 2010.

Subsidy requests for 2011 were approved for Cornerstone, Kalamazoo, and Wingham, and for 2010 for Cornerstone. Expenses for Classis amounted to \$1,472.78.

Classis will meet next on Wednesday, May 12, 2010 at the Hope PRC.

Rev. J. Slopsema closed the session with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk



Mission Activities

For those interested in our churches' on-going mission work in the Philippines, a website has been set up for keeping you current with that work: www.kleynsphilippines.blogspot.com. If you haven't already done so, we encourage you to give it a look. Not only will you get a feel for the work through written information and pictures, but you will also get a feel for daily life in the Philippines for our two missionaries and their families. To illustrate that point, the Kleyns' latest addition to their blog was entitled, "Cats and Frogs, and Things that go bump in the night."

Rev. J. Slopsema, pastor of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, preached January 17, on behalf of our Domestic Mission Committee, in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin, PA. Missionary W. Bruinsma has been working with this church, preaching for them once a month. The DMC has agreed to provide preaching on the third Sunday of every month with five Sundays.

The Consistory of the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in Manila has approved supplying the mission pulpit of the All of Grace PR Fellowship in Gabaldon with pulpit supply for the second Lord's Day of every month, or, when a month has five Lord's Days, the second and fifth Lord's Days of the month. The Consistory approved having Rev. Smit provide pulpit supply to the AGPRF on January 10. Rev. Kleyn was scheduled to provide pulpit

supply to the AGPRF on January 31, February 14, March 14, and so on.

Sister-Church Activities

Elder Pete VanDerSchaaf and Prof. R. Dykstra traveled to Northern Ireland in early January, as a Contact Committee delegation to visit our sister church there, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena. Their work included meeting with the Covenant congregation, conducting church visitation with the Council, and preaching for the congregation on Sunday, January 17, while Covenant's pastor, Rev. A. Stewart, traveled to Limerick, in the Republic of Ireland, to preach for the Fellowship there. Prof. Dykstra also had the opportunity to speak in Limerick on January 15, presenting a lecture entitled, "Dispensationalism: An Unbiblical View of the End of the World." Elder VanDerSchaaf and Prof. Dykstra left home on January 7 and returned on January 18.

Denomination Activities

The Reformed Witness Hour Committee recently informed the Chicago area churches that due to a lack of funds and the high cost of the RWH program on radio station WYLL, our broadcast will no longer be heard after the end of 2009. The RWH committee continues to look for other options to begin rebroadcasting in the near future, but until then, they encourage their listeners in the Chicago area to listen to the RWH at any time on the Internet at www.reformedwitnesshour.org.

Congregation Activities

The Loveland, CO PRC hosted a farewell program on Sun-

day evening, January 17, after their worship service, for Rev. and Mrs. Miersma. The Miersmas have served Loveland since 2006 and, due to health issues, Rev. Miersma is seeking emeritation in our churches. There was a time of fellowship and refreshments following the program. Rev. and Sharon planned to leave for Iowa on January 21, the Lord willing. May the Lord be near to them and bless them in their upcoming labors.

At the Council meeting in December and again in January, the Council of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA approved the purchase of video equipment to record and broadcast their services in video format. This equipment will be installed in the coming weeks. Covenant has also begun broadcasting the Reformed Witness Hour on KTW 630 AM on Friday afternoons at 2:30, with some advertising. They have already received response to this advertising. There were flyers available promoting the RWH, and the congregation was encouraged to take and distribute them. Their pastor, Rev. R. Kleyn, will be speaking on the RWH January through April this year.

Audio versions of the *Standard Bearer* are available for listening and downloading at the website of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI: southeastprc.org. This includes the current issue and some archived. Follow the link from the PRCA website to the Southeast PRC website and then to "SB Audio."

The Grandville, MI PRC began broadcasting their worship services live on-line. Anyone can access this via their website at www.grandvilleprc.org.

This January, the Seminary

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

made arrangements with the Councils of three of our west Michigan churches to host the internships of three seminary students. Seminarian Nathan Decker's internship will begin in July at the Grandville, MI PRC. Seminarian Jon Mahtani will serve his internship at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, and Semi-

narian Brian Huizinga will do his internship at the Southeast PRC, the Lord willing.

Minister Activities

The Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL extended a call to Rev. A. Spriensma to become their next pastor.

The congregation of the Cor-

nerstone PRC in Dyer, IN extended a call to Rev. J. Laning to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. G. Eriks declined the call he received to serve as the next pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC.

Rev. S. Key accepted the call from Loveland PRC in Colorado.



Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Southeast PRC expresses its deepest sympathy to Grace VandeVegte and Larry and Terri VandeVegte in the passing of their beloved husband and father,

PETE VANDEVEGTE.

May we all be comforted with the words of the psalmist in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Edward Ophoff, Jr., Asst. Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. Ivan Griess, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Griess, Mr. and Mrs. Glen Griess, Mr. and Mrs. David Griess, Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Griess, and Mr. and Mrs. Tim Griess and their families in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother,

MRS. LUELLA GRIESS.

May they be comforted with the words of Jesus in John 11:25, 26: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

August Hollema, Vice President
Robert Brands, Clerk

TEACHER NEEDED

The Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, Indiana is seeking applications from qualified individuals for a lower grade teaching position. If you are interested, please contact the administrator, Ryan Van Overloop, at (219) 558-2660 (school) or (219) 374-6547 (home) or the Education Committee chairman Don Terpstra, at (219) 322-8416.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Fellowship of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA expresses Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Ed Karsemeyer in the death of Ed's uncle,

MR. WILLIAM KARSEMEYER.

May they find comfort in the words of II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Tricia VanderWal, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

With gratitude to God we acknowledge

REV. RODNEY MIERSMA

for his 38 years of service in the ministry of the word and sacraments in the Protestant Reformed Churches. He began his ministry in Isabel, South Dakota in 1971. He has since served as pastor in Pella (Iowa), First Church in Holland (MI), Wellington (New Zealand), Immanuel PRC in Lacombe (Canada), missionary in Ghana (Africa), and finally here in Loveland (Colorado). We express our sincere thanks to him and his wife Sharon for all their diligent labors in our congregation and also in the entire denomination. We wish them the Lord's blessing as they begin their retirement in Hull, Iowa.

Loveland PRC
August Hollema, Vice President
Robert Brands, Clerk

TEACHERS NEEDED

The Protestant Reformed School in Wingham was unable to hire teachers to fill its classrooms last year. Therefore we have changed our plans and are hoping to open for the 2010-11 year, D.V. We are seeking a teacher/administrator for a class of 9 students in grades 7-12. Teaching will be assisted by online curriculum for the upper grades. We are also seeking an elementary teacher to teach a class of 16 students in grades K-6. Volunteer assistance will be available. For more information, please contact board vice-president Mr. Harvey Kikkert, at (519)523-4823, or email hkikkert@hurontel.on.ca.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express sympathy to Jayne Bodbyl and daughters Marcella and Emily, and to George Jr. and Michelle Bodbyl and children Olivia and Emma, in the passing of their beloved husband, father, and grandfather,

GEORGE BODBYL.

May they together say with the psalmist: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1, 2).

Rev. Arie denHartog, President
Don Doezeema, Clerk

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2010-2011 academic year should make application at the March 18, 2010 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 18 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Hull PRC extend their Christian sympathies to Alvin and Betty Bleyenbergh and family in the death of Betty's father,

ART BLEYENBERG, SR.

May they find comfort in the words of II Corinthians 1:3: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

Rev. S. Key, President
Gerald Brummel, Clerk of Records

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Hull PRC extend their Christian sympathies to Marlin and Sandy Westra and family in the death of Sandy's father,

PETER VANDE VEGTE.

May they find comfort in the words of I Thessalonians 5:10, 11: "Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

Rev. S. Key, President
Gerald Brummel, Clerk of Records

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of Southwest PRC expresses Christian sympathy to fellow-members Gerrit and Jeanette Boverhof in the death of Jeanette's mother,

LEONA PEPPER.

May they discover anew the truth of Deuteronomy 33:7: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Marvin Kamps, President
Judi Doezeema, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Elaine VanDyke, Dave and Julie VanOverloop, Jim and Kim VanDyke and their families in the death of Elaine's husband and Julie and Jim's father,

MR. JACK VAN DYKE.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3, 4).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
H. DeVries, Assist. Clerk

Check out the
RFPA web page at
www.rfpa.org

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Study Society of Southwest PRC expresses sympathy to fellow members George and Michelle Bodbyl and their children in the death of George's father,

GEORGE BODBYL, Sr.

May they learn by rich experience the truth of Isaiah 41:10: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Don Doezeema, President
Sara Kalsbeek, Secretary