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A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Zealous of Good Works

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Titus 2:14

This word of God speaks of being zealous of good works.

Are you zealous of good works?

Everyone has zeal for something. Not all, however, have a zeal for good works.

There is a people that Jesus Christ has redeemed from iniquity that are zealous of good works. Are you one of these people?

This people is found in the church. This is because the church is the people whom Jesus has redeemed. Sadly, not all in the church are zealous of good works. Are you zealous of good works?

In the preceding verses we are taught that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. This saving grace of God teaches us that we should live

soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we are told how the grace of God teaches these things.

By His grace God has redeemed us in Jesus Christ from all iniquity. In this work of redemption Christ purifies us as a peculiar people to Himself, zealous of good works. The point is very obvious. By producing a people zealous of good works, the grace of God teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in these good works.

The grace of God also teaches us to be zealous of good works in the new year that is upon us.



A contrast is made in the text between good works and iniquity. "Iniquity" is really the word "lawlessness." There are two ideas expressed in this term.

This lawlessness is, first, contempt for the law of God. God has given us His law to govern our lives. It governs our marriages, our family life, our work, our recreation, and all the various relationships of life. There is no

part of life that God's law does not govern. And God's law is good. There is blessing for those who keep it. Lawlessness is a contempt or hatred for this law.

This lawlessness is, second, an open violation of God's law. It is a refusal to live according to God's law, so that one tramples it underfoot in order to have one's own way. This is nothing but the outward manifestation of an inner contempt for God's law.

This lawlessness characterizes mankind, especially today. Society in general holds the law of God in open contempt. The standards that God has set for marriage, the family, authority, sex, life of the unborn, and the like are not only ignored but openly ridiculed. In this contempt society tramples God's law underfoot, even going out of its way to transgress it. This began at the fall and has steadily developed throughout history, so that we live in a lawless society. The result of this lawlessness is misery, fear, and pain.

This lawlessness is contrasted with good works.

If lawlessness is behavior that is contrary to God's law, then good works are works that are

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: gritters@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rfpa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: covenantreformed@audiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

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in harmony with that law. The standard of all good is not man's reason, feelings, or opinions, but God's law. Good works are those works that are in harmony with the law of God.

The word "good" here emphasizes that the behavior that conforms to God's law is beneficial and useful. When we speak of a good tool, we mean a tool that is useful. In like manner, good works are works that are useful and beneficial to others. They are useful to the Lord as He works to gather His church, to build her up, and to preserve her. They are also beneficial to our neighbor. In contrast, lawless behavior is always destructive. It is a hindrance to the work of God to save His people. It also is hurtful to the neighbor. But behavior that conforms to the law of God is always beneficial to the neighbor and useful to the Lord.



The word of God speaks of being zealous of these good works.

We read literally of a zealot of good works. A zealot is one who is filled with zeal for something. The word is often used in a negative sense, describing one who goes to extremes and becomes a radical. The history of the church is filled with examples of radicalism. Radicalism of any stripe is to be avoided.

To be a zealot of good works, however, is not radicalism. A true zealot of good works is not the 200 percenter, who goes beyond the requirements of God's law to impose upon others that which God does not require or to forbid that which God does not forbid.

A true zealot of good works is rather one who has a zeal to serve God and his neighbor by devoting himself to a life of good works. The zeal he has is a zeal to keep the law in its true essence by serving God in love and showing mercy, kindness, and justice to his neighbor.

Are you a zealot of good works?

We have many zealots in our society, but not of good works. Many are zealous to attain wealth, leisure, pleasure, recreation, position, and power. This kind of zeal leads them invariably into lawlessness.

There are many zealots in the church, who have the same zeal as the world—a zeal that also leads to lawlessness.

We must be zealots of good works.

We must be zealots of good works in the year of our Lord 2010.



That we might be zealous of good works, Jesus has redeemed us from all iniquity.

Redemption is deliverance from the power and control of someone or something through the payment of a price, which is called a ransom price. It was a term used to describe the freeing of a slave from his master through the payment of a price.

Iniquity, or lawlessness, is to be viewed as a power that has taken hold of mankind, so that it completely controls and dominates his life. It has become his master, enslaving him in a most horrible bondage.

This is to be explained by the fall. At the fall, mankind rebelled against God in lawlessness. As a punishment God gave mankind over to lawlessness with all its misery. This power of lawlessness so controls and dominates mankind that man is not able to do any good, much less be zealous of good works.

If we will do good works we must be redeemed from this lawlessness.

Christ has provided this redemption.

Notice that Jesus redeems us from all iniquity. By nature, the power of iniquity controls every part of our life—marriage, home,

work, recreation, and every relationship. Jesus has redeemed and delivered us from all iniquity.

One important element of this work of redemption is that Jesus purifies us.

This purifying is a spiritual purification or cleansing from sin. According to our Heidelberg Catechism it consists of two elements (cf. Q&A 70). First, there is the forgiveness of sins through the removal of guilt. Second, and on the basis of this forgiveness, there is a spiritual renewal, which transforms our lives from lawlessness to good works.

This spiritual cleansing is mentioned here as a further explanation of redemption. When Christ redeems us, He frees us from the bondage of lawlessness by cleansing us.

This redemption came at a high price. To redeem us from all iniquity, Jesus gave Himself for us. This means that He gave Himself to the death of the cross. God had appointed Jesus to die on the cross, which was the accursed death. To that death He gave Himself. Willingly He submitted to the cross, to endure the curse of God as the punishment for sin.

And notice that Jesus gave Himself to the horrors of the cross *for us*.

This "us" included Paul and Titus. It included the saints of God on the island of Crete among whom Titus was laboring. It includes the sum total of God's elect that are found in all history and in these latter days among all mankind.

For them Jesus gave Himself. This means, first, that He gave Himself to the accursed death of the cross for their benefit. But it also means that He gave Himself to the accursed death of the cross in their place. For His death to be of benefit for God's elect, Christ must take their place before God to bear away the penalty of their sin. This is what He did by His death on the cross.

By giving Himself for us, Christ has redeemed us from all iniquity. Redemption requires a ransom price. In the case of our redemption from iniquity, the ransom price was the horrible death of the cross, whereby Christ suffered the punishment due to us for our sin.



Being redeemed and purified by Christ, we become a peculiar people unto Christ.

By the term “people” is meant a people of common stock and origin. We become a people through the work of Christ to redeem and purify us. In the process of redemption and purification, we are born again in Jesus Christ. By this common birth we become a people with one language and custom.

Through our redemption, we become a *peculiar* people. “Peculiar” means that which is one’s own, belonging to one as a possession. Being redeemed by Christ, we become a peculiar people unto Him. When one redeemed a slave with a price, the slave was set free from his slavery. But when Christ redeems us from the slavery of sin, we become His property and possession. In fact, we become His slave, whose calling is to serve Him. Strange as it may sound, this new slavery is our freedom. Those that are redeemed by Christ find it a delight to serve Him. And in that service they find the joy of eternal life with God. This is true freedom!

In keeping with this, the chief characteristic of this redeemed


people is that they are zealous of good works.

Every people of a common birth have some things that especially characterize them and set them apart from all other peoples. What sets apart the people whom Christ has redeemed and purified is that they are zealous of good works. This holy zeal arises out of their very redemption and cleansing.

Do you claim to belong to the people that are redeemed by Jesus Christ?

Don’t forget what characterizes them. They are a people zealous of good works!

In the power of the cross, let us show ourselves to be those that belong to this redeemed people.

Let us show that also in this new year! 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

To Be or Not to Be Reformed: Upholding the Formula of Subscription

Every year in Protestant Reformed Churches across North America (usually this time of year), when elders and deacons are installed, a particularly solemn event occurs. A document is read and signed by any man who has not served as an officebearer in that congregation. Most often this is done in a public worship service (and churches are encouraged to do it publicly—the event deserves this emphasis). The officebearers are signing a document by which they affirm that they fully agree with all the doctrines and articles of the Reformed confessions, and that they promise to teach and defend them faithfully. They sign the Form (Formula) of Subscription.

Other Reformed churches around the world follow this same practice. Why?

Churches that insist that their officebearers sign this form understand that two things in particular characterize a Reformed church. The first is the adoption of and adherence to Reformed confessions. A Reformed church is a confessional church. The second essential element of a Reformed church is good order, starting with Reformed (i.e., biblical) church government.

Both are the legacy of John Calvin. When Calvin came to Geneva, he wrote two documents that he knew were essential for reform in that heavily Roman Catholic city, only recently having opted for the Reformation.

The first document was a confession of faith. Anyone who desired to be a member of the Reformed church in Geneva would eventually be required to express agreement with it. The other was his Ecclesiastical Ordinances, which was a church order.

This same pattern was followed in the Netherlands. There the Reformation grew and developed in the most adverse circumstances. The bloodiest persecution in all of Europe oppressed the Reformed saints in the Lowlands. This created untold suffering and hardship, as hundreds of thousands lost property, were imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. The church assemblies sometimes had to cross the border into Germany in order to meet in relative safety.

This history records two noteworthy facts that bear on the character of the Reformed church. The first is that, in the context of such bitter persecution, these Reformed churches produced the Belgic Confession and a Reformed church order. Second, in those early ecclesiastical gatherings, the assemblies often required their officebearers to sign the confession(s), and often, to sign the church order.

Do you see the significance? What the churches did was purposeful, for on the one hand they knew that the church must have good order. This good order is required, according to the apostle Paul, because "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33). In addition, good order serves a second, more important goal, namely, that the church must be faithful to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Those two elements in a Reformed church come together in the Form (or Formula) of Subscription. This is a form that officebearers in Reformed churches are required to sign (hence, "subscription"). The heart of the form is this promise: We *believe* what the confessions teach and we *will uphold* them.

The Form of Subscription (FOS) has a long history in Reformed churches that trace their origin to the Netherlands.

This history has not always been positive. The FOS has been attacked, revised, and eliminated at various times in different Reformed churches, as we will see. Currently the Christian Reformed Church is studying the matter of revision of the FOS. In 2008, a study committee presented to synod a radical revision of the FOS that would have emptied the document of any power or worth. That synod, after declining to adopt the proposal, expanded the study committee and instructed it to come with a revised proposal to the synod of 2011.

A church relaxes the strict requirements of the FOS when the truth is no longer loved and revered in her midst. Such a church is already apostatizing. History demonstrates that weakening of the FOS ultimately results in a vitiation of Reformed truth. In short, such a church ceases to be Reformed.

To be or not to be Reformed—that is the issue. The importance of the FOS cannot be overstated. Every Reformed church must insist on a strict subscription to the confessions, or she will lose all that she has.

In order to understand the importance of upholding the FOS, we intend to explore three aspects of the issue. First, we must understand the important place of confessions in a Reformed church. Second, the history and requirements of the FOS must be clearly set forth. And then, we must face such practical considerations as the following: Who must sign the FOS? What exactly does a man promise when he signs it? And why is it necessary to have and maintain the Form of Subscription?

The confessions

What are confessions? A confession is a statement by a church (or group of churches) containing a declaration of what a church believes to be the truth of the word of God. The very word 'confession' is instructive. It means *to speak with*, or *to say the same thing as*. Thus, by means of a confession, church members speak together; they confess the same truth. More importantly, they speak the same thing that God speaks in His word.

Properly understood, it follows that a church that adopts a confession speaks the same thing as 1) the church of all ages and 2) the church of Christ all over the world. A confession ought not be merely an expression of unity among a few believers in a given

moment of time and in a certain place.

Confessions are also rightly called creeds. The term creed comes from the Latin word for *I believe*. This emphasizes the subjective element of confessions, namely, the act of believing. It reminds us that the truth of the Bible is not merely interesting information; it is rather a matter of faith and personal conviction. And faith is, according to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 7), the spiritual bond that unites us to Christ, so that we know and are sure of our salvation.

Not everyone wants confessions. Some may insist that *the Bible is enough*. However, the church has learned that it is not enough simply to say: "We believe the Bible." Conflicts over doctrine have demonstrated this.

The first major doctrinal conflict that troubled the church (after the death of the apostles) was the Arian controversy over the question: "Is Jesus very God?" The Arians insisted that the Bible taught that Jesus was *like* God. Jesus was, they insisted, the greatest of all creatures. But He was the Son, and not the same essence as the Father.

The church tried answering the Arians with various Bible verses to show that Jesus is very God. At first they used only the words, the terminology of the Bible, such as "Jesus is the Son of God." The Arians said, "We agree with that." Finally, the church had to draw up a creed stating that Jesus is very God, of one essence with the Father. The point is, the church could not separate the true church from the heretical simply by saying: "We believe the Bible."

Today the same is true with many conflicts, as for example, "Whom does God love?" The Arminians say "All men" and point to John 3:16: "For God so loved the world...." The Re-

formed insist that God loves only the elect, citing Romans 9:13: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Simply quoting Bible verses will not settle the question.

This essential need for confessions is due to the very nature of the Bible. The Bible is not an encyclopedia of theology, so that one can look up various doctrines, such as the atonement, or creation, and find definitions of these truths. Rather, the Bible is a book of history and prophecy. It contains laws, epistles (letters), and even poetry and songs.

The truth of God is all there in the Bible. The Bible is God's word, and God's word is truth. But the specific teachings on a doctrine, like creation, are found throughout the whole of Scripture (Genesis 1-3; Exodus and Deuteronomy [the ten commandments]; Job; Psalms; Romans; Revelation—to mention a few places). This is one reason why Jesus, before He died, promised to send His Spirit, called the Spir-

it of Truth. Jesus promised that His Spirit would guide the church into the truth (John 16:13, 14). (See also John 14:17, 26; 15:26.)

Thus it happens that, in a time of conflict over what the Bible teaches, the church studies the Bible, rejects the lie, and sets forth the truth more clearly. The result is a confession.

Confessions are not only necessary for the defense of the truth, they are also extremely helpful for the believers. If you want to know what the Bible teaches about God's work of creation or about election or the resurrection, go to the confessions—they summarize what the Bible teaches.

The value of the confessions

Much could be written about the great value of confessions. We list but five points.

First, by means of a creed the church—*united*—expresses her faith. She thus manifests the reality that the church is one body, with one Lord, and one faith.

Second, the confessions are

excellent teaching tools for instructing the next generation in the Reformed faith.

Third, the confessions tie the church of today with the church of the past—the church of God is truly one.

Fourth, confessions lay the foundation for subsequent development of doctrine.

Finally, as Presbyterian theologian Samuel Miller puts it: "The adoption and publication of a creed is a tribute to truth and candor, which every Christian church owes to other churches, and to the world around her" (*Doctrinal Integrity*, p. 14). Simply put: Confessions tell those without what this church believes!

The confessions, therefore, have great value for the church, provided the church *maintains* these confessions in faith and practice. That is the purpose of the FOS.

Next time, the Lord willing, we turn to the content of the FOS and the instructive history behind it.



RFPA Annual Meeting

Rev. Garry Eriks

Read Any Good Books? Reformed Books in the Reformed Home

Do you read good, Reformed books? Do you read the *Standard Bearer* and the books published by the RFPA? In your home do you teach your children to read? Do you model this in your home? If you are doing this, my desire is

that you be encouraged to continue reading good, Reformed material. If you are struggling to read, may you be inspired to read good, Reformed (RFPA) books in your homes.

Although I was excited to speak on this topic, the task of showing the importance of reading is not easy. Who would disagree with the proposition that it is vital for Reformed Christians to read? Our practice may not always show it, but who would really disagree? Of course read-

ing good literature is important. It is part of Reformed thinking. Sometimes when that is the case, it can be difficult to put into words what we instinctively know is good and right.

Historically, writing and reading good books has always been seen as important in the church. This goes back to the apostle Paul, who requested in II Timothy 4:13 that his coat, which he left in Troas, be brought to him, and "the books, but especially the parchments." As he sat in prison

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

This is the text of the speech given on September 24, 2009 at the annual meeting of the RFPA.

in Rome facing death, Paul still believed there was great value in reading. The church fathers saw the importance of the printed page. Even today we can read what the church fathers wrote. Martin Luther saw the value of the printed page. God moved him to write, so that Luther was responsible for one third of the published books in the German language in his day. He knew that the message of the gospel could, by writing, be spread further, and more Christians could grow in grace, and the church would be strengthened.

We know the value today, which is why we all have at least some good Reformed books on our bookshelves. But why should we read good, Reformed books?

The Reason

Reading good, Reformed books is vital for the spiritual health, strength, and growth of the individual believer and the church as a whole. Let me put this in terms of the physical. If you are weak and lethargic physically and you go to the doctor, he will ask about your diet. What do you eat? Do you eat enough dairy products, fruit, vegetables, and grains? How much junk food do you eat? Do you have a balanced diet? The same could be asked in regard to your spiritual health—do you have a balanced diet? Your spiritual health is directly connected to your spiritual diet. This is true in regard to the preaching, which is the spiritual food for our souls. But this is true also in regard to reading. Where there is good, Reformed reading, you will find spiritual health. If one doesn't read much, or if his reading consists of junk-food reading, that man will be spiritually weaker than the man who reads good, Reformed literature. The saying goes, "You are what you eat." So also you are what you read, and you read what you are. The Reformed Christian will read good,

Reformed books for his spiritual health.

Here are four reasons that reading good, Reformed books is vital for the spiritual health, strength, and growth of the believer and the church.

First, reading is vital for our spiritual health because the Christian faith is a faith of the mind. This is what we read in Romans 12:1, 2, which speaks of "the renewing of your mind." Faith includes knowledge (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7). It is not all feelings; it is not all emotions. Faith involves knowing God, which is a matter of the mind and heart. We grow in this knowledge by hearing the preaching and by reading the Bible. But our faith also grows when we read good, Reformed books that teach us the truth of God's word.

John 17:3 teaches us that all believers must know God: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Does any Christian not need to know God? This passage shows that knowing God is not an option. The knowledge of God is necessary to eternal life. There is nothing more important to know in the entire world than God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

For us to grow in this knowledge of God, we must read good, Reformed books. In our day of false doctrine, worldly philosophies, and pop psychology, we must be grounded in the absolute truth of God's word. Reading good material is one of the best ways to grow in the knowledge of the truth.

Second, reading contributes to the spiritual growth of the church because we come under the ministries of many pastors and teachers that Jesus Christ has given to the church. Jesus Christ has given to the church the Spirit of Truth, who teaches the church about Christ. Within the church our ascended Lord, Jesus Christ,

gives a variety of gifts to men for teaching and exhorting. This is true not only in the present-day church, but also in the church in the past. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul teaches us that our ascended Lord gives pastors and teachers. We have the permanent ministry of pastors and teachers. When we read this passage we probably think only of the present ministry in our local congregations. Paul has something much larger in mind. He is speaking about the gifts of pastors and teachers to the entire church. Through the printed page we can benefit from the gifts Jesus Christ gave to men years ago and from different men in the church today who are not our own pastors. These pastors and teachers can edify and encourage us, although we may be separated from them by a great distance or by time. In a little pamphlet entitled *Read Any Good Books?*, Sinclair Ferguson wrote:

Think of that when you next take a book into your hands! You can sit under the ministry of Augustine, or Calvin, or John Owen, or Baxter, or Bunyan, or Edwards, or Boston, or Spurgeon! [May I add Abraham Kuyper, Herman Hoeksema, and many others—GJE.] Even those who are dead may yet speak to you and by their exposition of God's truth help forge you into the kind of man or woman that was produced in earlier days by their living testimony and ministry.¹

Third, reading good books is important for our personal spiritual growth and development. II Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We are commanded to grow in grace and in knowledge. This is a striking command, when you think about it, because noth-

¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Read Any Good Books?*, Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992, p. 5.

ing else is commanded to grow. We do not command our children to grow. We do not stand in our gardens commanding vegetables to grow. Farmers do not drive through their fields commanding their crops to grow. But God commands us to grow. To grow in grace and in knowledge we need the right spiritual diet in the preaching. This spiritual diet should be supplemented by good reading. Good reading promotes spiritual maturity in our lives. It transforms our minds and lives into the image of Jesus Christ. It brings our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. Through good reading we will see how great our God is. We learn about the wonder of His amazing grace and love for us as the Scriptures are explained in these books. This strengthens our faith.

Reading good books helps us to understand ourselves better. Have you had that experience when reading a book or a *Standard Bearer* article? Good reading can be painful because as the author explains the Scriptures concerning sin, we see the sins of our own hearts and lives. These writings are used by God to expose our sins and our selfishness. These same books, as they teach us about God, remind us to live for the glory of His name. The result is growth.

Good reading fills our minds with thoughts of God and His word. These books set before us His majesty and glory. And this knowledge leads us in our lives. Right doctrine leads to right living. Good books help us grow in all aspects of our lives: in marriage, in the rearing of our children, in the single life. These good books keep us focused on the heavenly, so that we are heavenly minded more and more in our lives. What a great blessing books are for our spiritual growth and maturing.

Fourth, reading good books is vital for the health and growth

and preservation of the church. This is true because good books explain the truth of God's word. This truth is the solid, indestructible foundation of the church. This means the church must know the truth. Therefore, reading is vital for the health of the church as a whole.

Let me pinpoint a few areas especially that magnify the importance of reading. First, it is important that we have officebearers who are readers. In all of their work, the officebearers work with the Scriptures. The deacons bring comforting words from Scripture on their visits. The elders are called to be apt to teach. They teach at family visitation, they teach on their discipline visits, and sometimes they teach the catechism classes. They teach the truth. Their own understanding of that truth will grow not only by reading the Scriptures, but also by reading what other men have written about the Scriptures. This will better equip them for their work. Young men of the church should set aside time to read to prepare themselves to serve Jesus Christ and the church in the special offices, if this is God's will.

But good reading is not limited to the officebearers. The church is called earnestly to contend for the faith (Jude 3). This is the calling of officebearers and the members of the church. We read how other men contended for the faith against those who taught false doctrines. Reading sharpens our understanding of those errors and how to combat them.

Good reading helps the church's witness in the world. We learn better how to explain the truth to others. We learn to speak the truth in love, as others have done.

Good books help us to serve and encourage one another with comforting words from Scripture. Good books serve to comfort our

souls. When we are comforted by what we read, we can use these ideas to comfort others who are hurting in the church. Good reading gives a store of ideas and understanding that we may use in the service of the other members of the church.

The Calling

May we all, young and old, be encouraged to read. It is vital, for our own personal spiritual health and for the health of our churches, that we read. Although we understand this and agree with this, the practical reality is that for some this is extremely difficult. Some of us are avid readers. Others are not. Some like to read, but we like the exciting, well-written novels. Others maybe read occasionally, but we like the easy-read fluff or junk found in many bookstores today. I encourage you to read good, Reformed books.

I want you to understand that this does not require a high IQ. I don't want to set the bar too high for you. Some of you may say, "But I read so slowly, and sometimes I have to reread what I just read because I don't understand what I read." If you read slowly or you find reading difficult, don't let that discourage you. Be assured that the more you do it the easier it will become. Sometimes we have all these books and don't know where to start. So we just don't start. Others of us start a book, but it sits on the nightstand or coffee table for a week or two and we don't get back into it. Other men, after working hard all day, fall asleep so quickly when reading a book. This is understandable also. But don't let these things discourage you or keep you from doing this for your own spiritual benefit.

The first thing to do would be to set aside a time of the week to read in the home. It is important that this be done in the home. Parents should be setting an ex-

ample to their children that there is a regular time to read good, Reformed literature so that this becomes part of the lives of the children as they get older. In my home growing up, the time of the week devoted to this was Sunday afternoon. We had dinner, we slept for a while (probably too long), then mom and dad read while we prepared for catechism. As we got older, dad would point out articles in the *SB* or the *Beacon Lights* and we would read those. This was a time for reading. This is a good place to start. The same could be done on Sunday evenings for a while.

It would be good to set aside another time during the week. For many people a good time to read is before going to bed. Take a half hour or an hour to read. Others maybe have a half hour at their lunch break. Or right after supper, when the children are doing homework and between questions, parents can sit nearby and read. Mothers can read to their children from *The Farbers* before they go to bed.

The key is scheduling. If you wait for the time to read, you won't find it. During the time that is scheduled, turn off the TV, stay away from the computer, and devote that time to reading. In these small chunks, you will be surprised at how much you can get done taking one book at a time.

Another time to use for reading books is devotional time. For variety, I have used books for devotional reading. There are many RFPAs books suited to this because the authors of these books are explaining the truth of God's Word. The book *Saved by Grace* has a valuable study guide that forces you to open the Scriptures. *Doctrine According to Godliness* has small, succinct sections that are conducive to daily reading. *When You Pray* could be used profitably to study what God's word says about prayer. Rev. Hoeksema's sermons on Romans, *Righteous by Faith Alone*, could be used. These are just a few suggestions.

The Books

What should I read? Where can I find this good Reformed literature? The RFPAs has a gold mine of good reading material on a wide variety of subjects. There are different books for all readers. Sinclair Ferguson writes: "Being a good reader does not mean having read many books, but knowing some good books, and having mastered your best and greatest books."² It is easy to become lovers of books, so that we fill bookshelves with books that we never read. Publishers, even Christian Publishers, know that some people buy books simply because it

is the latest book to be published. What is key for us is to master a few and to have a well balanced diet of good, Reformed books.

What is this well-balanced diet? We should read books on doctrine. We should read other books that explain books of the Bible or biblical topics.

It is good and important to read biographies and history. In the biographies we see how Christ has powerfully worked in the lives of others. We see the power of God's grace working in the lives of sinners. In these books, we see men God has raised up in the history of the church. It is also good to read books on church history to see what great things God has done in the history of the church. We see the heroes of faith, those who have run the race and have now received the prize. Their lives and God's faithfulness in the history of the church encourage us to run the race and to fight the good fight of faith.

The RFPAs has devotional reading. They have excellent books on marriage and family living. They have books for young and old alike. Our reading does not need to be limited to the RFPAs books, but this is a great place to start to build our libraries with good, Reformed books.



When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuiper

A Time to Laugh

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Cheerfulness

In our sin saturated life, laughter stands in such bad repute with us, that the very thought that the Lord our God can laugh is distasteful to us.

If it were not written in Scrip-

ture, and if there you did not read in so many words: "He that sitteth in the heavens *shall laugh*," it would never have come to you so much as to suggest "laughter" on the part of God.

Laughter and seriousness

form to our perception so sharp a contrast, that, according to general opinion, in holy things *seriousness* alone has a place, even such *somber* seriousness as excludes every inclination to laugh.

We know indeed that there is such a thing as an innocent laugh. And that all laughter as such is by no means to be condemned. But yet, to our perception, laughter belongs exclusively to life in the world, and is excluded from life in the sanctuary.

And in part this perception is correct.

In our broken nature, only as yet restored in its incipency, we incline involuntarily to relax ourselves by laughter, to get away from the deep seriousness of life, and to lose ourselves more in what is light and trivial.

If you were able to gather up all the laughter of a village during four-and-twenty hours in a phonograph, and then analyze what gave rise to this laughter, into what mood it brought people, and what it effected, you would find that in nine cases out of ten all higher sense is absent from people's laughter.

There is, indeed, the laugh of inward joy of soul, wherewith the young mother looks upon her babe at her breast. There is the laugh of the poor, at the sight of bread for his hunger. There is the laugh of joy, of those who in faithfulness and love, before the face of God, unite themselves to each other as man and wife.

But these are exceptions.

Most laughter, by far, is laughter of fun and folly, or even the laughter of scorn.

To which is added that universal *note of laughter*, which in some companies dominates all conversation, when wit, that has mostly missed the mark, exerts and exhausts itself always to be cunning, always to be chummy, and to make the joke pass as currency in our life.



Yet he is mistaken who deems on this account that laughter is an invention of the Evil One.

If *laughter* and *tears* stand over against each other, it must rather be confessed, that laughter belongs to the nature of man, and not tears.

He who weeps has sorrow. And sorrow is misery. There would be no misery among men nor in the whole creation of God, were it not for sin.

In Paradise, before sin entered into the heart of Adam, you cannot imagine him weeping, but indeed laughing with holy joy. And when in the Paradise that is to come, all sin shall have been brought to nought, the hour also comes when all tears shall have been washed away from every face.

Thus tears there were not, and once shall no more be; they belong to the sinful estate that separates Paradise that went under, from Paradise that we look for from the heavens.

Of God the Lord we are nowhere told that He weeps. Of angels we read that they rejoice, not that they mourn.

Poets may so have represented it, but God's word does not teach it.

The matter stands altogether different with respect to *laughter*.

Of God the Lord we truly read that He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, even with a laugh that often seems to us most sinful, to wit, with the laugh of scorn. For upon this it follows immediately: "The Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2).

And when in His beatitudes Christ applies His "blessed" to those that mourn, He says that

they are blessed because *now* they mourn, but in the day of glory they shall *laugh*.

So little even is laughter excluded from our nature, that, of the destruction of the godless, Scripture says that "the righteous shall see it, and shall *laugh*" (Ps. 52:6).

The Lord Himself says to the godless: "I also will *laugh* at your calamity" (Prov. 1:26).

When the people of the Lord return from exile and look again upon Jerusalem, in the triumph-song it reads: "Then was our mouth filled with *laughter*."

Even experience teaches that too much weeping depresses our physical nature, and that laughter, which shakes the liver, makes the blood course free and fresh again through our veins.



Yet the same Scripture puts a limit to laughter.

Undoubtedly, laughter and not tears belongs to your nature as God created you. Once laughter belonged in Paradise, and shall once more belong to the realm of glory; but in Paradise you are now *no more* and in the realm of glory *not yet*.

You are now in a world of sin and in the time of grace, and therefore Jesus says: "Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6:25).

Also the holy apostle admonishes the people of the world: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness" (James 4:9).

Even the Preacher from of old already told Israel, "Sorrow is better than laughter" (Eccl. 7:3).

For the sake of our misery, tears are given us; and ability to mourn, so long as the root of

...laughter, which
shakes the liver,
makes the blood
course free
and fresh again
through our veins.

sin is not gone from our heart and misery goes on about us, is a *grace* loaned us of God.

To see how the vain world, amid laughter and play, hurries on in the pathways of destruction is against nature and fills you with sorrow.

Laughter belongs to your nature, once it returns; but keynote of our present existence it cannot be in *this* dispensation.

The mirth that seeks to pre-dominate all of your life is a jeer at the misery that cries all about us; a palliation of the sin that roots in the bottom of the heart; worse still, a mocking at the seriousness that life, with such an heart and amidst such misery before the face of the Lord, awakes in us.



Does this mean to say that *all laughter* is therefore amiss, and that piety demands that with sternness and gruffness of face you must disarm every laugh in the family circle?

On the contrary.

Holy Scripture emphatically declares that there is a time to weep, but also that there is *a time to laugh* (Eccl. 3:4).

Thus laughter is granted you. Laughter in everyday life at what is cunning. Fine laughter over what interests you by its wit-tiness. The laugh of kindness wherewith you look your neighbor in the eye. The laugh of happiness over a blessing received. Even the holy laugh wherewith inwardly you jubilate in the hidden walk with your God.

Banish laughter you need least of all. And when you look at pictures of the heroes among our fathers who have fought the battle of God, in their strong and manly face, beneath their holiest seriousness, there is ever a play of laughter.

Only, while there is a time to laugh, it must lay no claim upon *all* your time.

Laughter may have its play in your life, but it may not dominate your life. It may render your association agreeable, but must not strike the keynote therein.

Your right to laugh must be captured by showing first that you also understand what it is *to mourn*, to mourn over your own heart and misery and the misery round about you.



And it is at this point, that with laughter sin comes in.

Lovers of laughter, but who do not know the *sorrow after God* and have never learned weeping from inner assault of soul.

Young and old of days who by their vain laughter have unconsciously come under the dominion, under the power, of the laugh, and thereby have become unsusceptible of higher and holier seriousness.

Men and women who are together hour by hour, without a sensible word passing their lips, who

spend their days in what is called "stuff and nonsense."

An evil ended in the dreadful house of our insane, where sometimes you find madmen, who always laugh and grin and roar with laughter, and can no more escape from the violence of that terrible laugh.

Something of this insanity you observe already in advance in the companies of those who always play, always joke, always laugh.

They literally laugh away the seriousness of life, and solve life into one long-drawn-out play.

And this is not all.

For when once the laugh

has overpowered you, and has robbed your heart of seriousness, it soon passes over into an unholy, an evil, sometimes a devilish laugh.

Till at length it becomes the jeering laugh at what is holy, the making sport of him who stands in your way, or the laugh to one's heart's content at the need or sorrow of others.

Oh, one refers so frequently to sin in word and deed, but is it not time that you should come to a confession of sin committed in *your laughter*, even though with you personally it has not come so far yet as the poisonous laughter of scorn?

Here too, we grant, the drawing of the proper boundary is, oh, so difficult, for by somberness and peevishness and unfriendly surliness there is equal sin committed against the love of God.

But there is a limit. And we ourselves must reverence this limit. Before this limit we must teach our children to maintain a stand.

In the way of our fathers our domestic and social intercourse must not be one continuous laughter with a single drop of seriousness to offset it.

Neither also one constant seriousness, offset with a forced laugh.

Far less yet, nothing but laughter in the heart, with a mask of seriousness before the face.

This can never be according to God's word, and has ever been despised by our fathers.

No, genuine seriousness worked in us of God, which aims not at *semblance* but at *reality*, does not need the *outside* decoration of a laugh.

From this in God-consecrated seriousness comes of itself the generous laugh, but a laugh weaned from sin, and especially *a laugh at its proper time.*



Angels

The original and preeminent inhabitants of heaven are angels. Magnificent creatures, their power, freedom, and glory is unsurpassed. Essentially, angels are spirits—ethical, rational, and living souls created in the beginning with heaven, their home (Job 38:4-7). Though non-corporeal, they are described with earthly and heavenly features, reflecting their transcendence and work as intermediaries. With bird-like wings (even multiple pairs) and star-like brilliance, angels are the mighty steeds (*cherubs*) and holy, fiery ones (*seraphs*) of the heavens. Yet, angels can appear on earth in an instant, take human form, eat, walk, and talk; are full of eyes; and have one, two or four earthly faces—of a lion, calf, man, and eagle (Ezek. 10:12-14; 41:18; Rev. 4:6-8).

As members of God's household with us, angels too are called the sons of God (Job 1:6). The Lord dwells with them and they surround His throne (Rev. 5:11; Ps. 80:1). Beholding His face continually, angels worship Him, and share in the glory of His truth, holiness, and love (Matt. 18:10). Specifically, angels are designated servants in God's house, and their obedience exemplary (Matt. 6:10). Standing on the four corners of the earth, they are agents of God's providence, acting in, through, and even miraculously outside the laws of creation when required. Full of eyes, they know His revealed will perfectly. With wings they immediately deploy anywhere in the universe to accomplish His will unencumbered by any physical laws. An innumerable throng, they are the mighty wings of God and so many glorious fingers of His Fatherly hand (Heb. 12:22; Ps. 18:10).

More specifically, angels represent the brute creation's groaning interest and particular role in fulfilling God's covenant with His elect in Jesus Christ—the supreme example that providence serves grace. Woven into the very fabric of the universe and continually hovering over the mercy seat of God's temple, they are creation's most powerful agents to observe, announce, guard, and ensure the fulfillment of the covenant on behalf of its heirs (Ex. 25:20; 26:1; Heb. 1:14). With decency and good order, every

angel has an assigned station and calling in this regard (Eph. 3:10).

Some angels are messengers of the covenant. They announce God's covenant promises, assure doubting saints, comfort the distressed, interpret visions, direct the course of the gospel, sanctify prayers, and rejoice over the penitent (Gen. 22:15; 31:11; Dan. 8:16; Acts 8:26; 27:23; Rev. 8:3; Luke 15:10). They announce the birth of covenant leaders, encourage them in battle, and instruct covenant parents in their upbringing (Judges 13:3-5). One such messenger is Gabriel, sent from God's presence to Daniel, Zacharias, and Mary (Dan. 8:16, 9:21; Luke 1:19). Similarly, as messengers, human prophets and pastors are called angels.

Other angels are warriors of the covenant, protecting God's people and taking vengeance on their enemies. They rescue saints from destruction, protect from murderous siblings, lead to godly wives, deliver from prison, lions, and fiery furnace (Gen. 19:15; 24:7; 32:1; Acts 12:7; Dan. 6:22; 3:28). These angels are watchers of men, present in true churches, care for its little ones, and escort believers to heaven (Dan. 4:13; I Cor. 11:10; Matt. 18:10; Luke 16:22). They form an impregnable fiery army around the church and destroy apostates, heathen nations, armies, and kings (Ps. 68:17; I Cor. 10:10; Acts 12:23). One such angel is Michael, appointed champion of the church, who withstood antichrists, disputed with Satan, led an army that cast him from heaven, and at the end will battle Satan's champion (Dan. 10:20; 12:1; Rev. 12:7-10; Matt. 13:39).

Angels took a special interest and role in the ministry of our Lord. They brought the first good tidings of His incarnation and birth, ministered to Him in temptation and distress, and explained His resurrection and ascension (Matt. 4:11; Luke 22:43). Fitting, because Jesus is THE Angel of the Lord, THE messenger and champion of the covenant, who mediates, proclaims, establishes, guards, fulfills, and avenges it. Made a little lower than angels for suffering of death, He now is crowned with greater glory and power, set over all the works of God's hands, and shall return with His angels to reap the harvest (Heb. 2:6-9). And we shall join in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb.... Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, and power be unto our God forever. Amen."



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

The Christian and Carbon Credits

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Psalm 24:1

We hear much discussion in the world today about the “global warming” that many scientists claim man is causing. The “green,” or environmental, movement is even becoming a substantial factor influencing elections and political candidates. Automakers are producing more and more “hybrid” or “flex-fuel” vehicles in an attempt to lower emissions of carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse” gases. In June of 2009, the United States House of Representatives passed its version of a bill aimed at reducing emissions, known as “cap and trade” legislation. An international climate conference is scheduled to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. Discussion of the “cap and trade” bill, as well as discussion of the United States’ involvement at Copenhagen, has been overshadowed to a large extent by the debate over health care reform and the economic recession. However, believers would do well to pay attention to the developments taking place in this area of the law.

Let us begin by noting that there is merit in being good stewards of the environment. This includes avoiding needless pollution that destroys the world and resources our heavenly Fa-

ther has provided us. At times, men motivated by sinful greed have caused pollution that harms the health of their neighbor, all for the sake of making an extra dollar or two. Obviously we cannot condone such behavior. We should also be good stewards in the sense that we do not needlessly consume excessive amounts of natural resources, such as fossil fuels, in a wasteful way. The problem is not the notion of preventing pollution or preserving resources, but in the motivations and methodology of many in the “environmentalist” movement today, as well as the effects on the autonomy of the United States and other Western countries. These effects will be discussed in some detail later.

The history of the environmental movement as it pertains to international law began its development many years ago. For the past couple of decades, scientists have noted a warming trend in the earth’s climate. Warming and cooling trends have been noted as long as history records such information, but some scientists became concerned in particular about so-called “anthropogenic,” or man-initiated, warming. Scientists throughout the international community theorized that greenhouse gases from man’s activities, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and sulphur hexafluoride, were causing the warming trends.

These concerns precipitated the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC, which is an international treaty designed to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations to prevent

anthropogenic interference with the climate system.¹ To implement the goals of this treaty, many nations signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol, under which a number of industrialized countries agreed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions based on the benchmark year of 1990. In lieu of actually reducing emissions, these nations can purchase “carbon credits,” or pay for new projects that will reduce emissions, often constructed in developing nations such as China. Any action that would reduce man’s contribution to greenhouse gases has potential to qualify as a carbon credit. China has suggested that its one-child-per-family policy has helped fight global warming, and should be eligible for carbon credits.² This is the same one-child-per-family policy that has been widely criticized for its use of forced abortions and sterilizations for enforcement.³

A system of exchanges much like a stock exchange has been established to handle the trade in carbon credits. China in particular has benefitted from the influx of funds from foreign countries for its massive hydroelectric dams, as well as the revenue generated from the trading in carbon credits themselves.⁴ Also, countries like China benefit be-

¹ Article 2, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

² Alister Doyle, “China Says One Child Policy Helps Protect Climate,” *Reuters*, August 30, 2007.

³ Simon Elegant, “Why Forced Abortions Persist in China,” *Time*, April 30, 2007.

⁴ *China Benefits from Rise in Carbon-Credit Trading*, Marketwatch.com, January 8, 2007.

Mr. VanEngen, a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney.

cause, as developing countries, their caps on emissions are tied to their growth, so that if their economy grows 10 percent, but emissions increase by 9%, it is credited to them as a reduction in emissions.⁵ Since the UNFCCC treaty was first adopted in 1997, carbon emissions in the U.S. have increased by 7%, while carbon emissions in Japan have increased 9%. During the same period, carbon emissions in China have doubled.⁶

The United States has never ratified the Kyoto Protocol. The United States Senate unanimously passed a resolution stating that it would not ratify a climate treaty that would seriously harm the U.S. economy or that didn't hold developing countries to the same standard as industrialized countries. President Bush reiterated the same reasons when he announced in March of 2001 that the United States would not implement the Kyoto Protocol.

However, "cap-and-trade" legislation designed to require caps and trading of credits like that anticipated by the Kyoto Protocol was introduced in the United States Congress this year. With the change of political climate over the past several elections, proponents were able to get House bill HR 2454, known as the "American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009," passed in the House of Representatives. The Senate, which is more evenly divided between the two parties, has not yet begun to address the Senate version of the bill as this article goes to print.


As this article goes to print, an international climate conference is scheduled to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, from December 7-18, 2009. Since the United States has the largest economy, and therefore has the

largest carbon emissions in the world, the international community had exerted immense pressure for the U.S. to pass cap and trade legislation before the conference took place. President Obama has indicated that he will push for the United States to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.⁷ We will have to wait to see what decisions are made at the Copenhagen conference, whether the Senate passes cap and trade legislation, and ultimately whether Congress ratifies the Kyoto Protocol.

Many different reasons are given for opposing the Kyoto Protocol and cap and trade legislation. Many insist that the science behind the theory of global warming itself is flawed. Recently, hackers published emails from scientists studying global warming that seemed to indicate that data had been "doctored" to produce calculations supporting the theory of man-made global warming. Many object that such restrictions will damage the economy. Others object to the unfairness that developing countries are not subject to the caps on emissions. As believers, our main concern with climate change legislation should not be the economic effect on our pocketbooks.

Regardless of these arguments, there is an aspect of the current direction of United States policy with regard to climate change legislation that is especially noteworthy. That aspect is the movement towards subjugating the United States economy to those of other countries. The United States is a sovereign nation. Its internal affairs become subject to the treaties of the world as a whole only if it ratifies those treaties, and voluntarily places itself under them. Once the United States has placed itself under that law, it is bound to do what the

international community dictates. If the international community decides that China should be given carbon credits for aborting and murdering its children, as China has argued, the United States will pay to abort those children when it pays to purchase carbon credits. That is just one example, but one can easily see how the United States economy becomes tied to the actions of other nations. Will the day come when we are taxed for leaving too large a "carbon footprint" by having too many children? Articles in this rubric have before noted the changes in the law that occur as traditional Christian values are abandoned. How much faster will this occur as we couple our laws to those of countries that have not traditionally been influenced by Christian values?

The area of climate change may be the first in which such extensive action is being taken, but it isn't the only area being targeted for greater global cooperation. Individuals from several nations have called for global regimes to address terrorism. Some, including President Obama, have called for greater global cooperation as the only solution to the current global economic crisis.⁸ In such a political climate, it is easy to see that the day could soon come when the legal framework is in place for a world power that can control every aspect of the economy, with the accompanying police power to reach into any nation on earth. The Lord has revealed to us in Revelation 17:12-14 that the ten kings of earth will one day turn over their power to the beast. But as believers, we can take comfort in knowing that victory already belongs to the Lamb, and that all things are done in accord with the will of our heavenly Father. 

⁵. Eugene Robinson, "The Copenhagen Conundrum," *Washington Post*, December 1, 2009.

⁶. Ibid.

⁷. Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Obama's Backing Raises Hope for a Climate Pact," *New York Times*, February 28, 2009.

⁸. Foon Rhee, "Obama Says Global Cooperation Needed on Economy," *The Boston Globe*, March 24, 2009.

Women Assisting the Deacons (3) A Historical Survey: Reformed Churches

In our last article, we surveyed the history of the Christian church permitting women to assist the deacons through the time of the Middle Ages. We concluded that at times the early Christian church did let women perform duties that Scripture does not permit women to perform; that, nevertheless, one cannot appeal to the history of the early church to defend women holding church office; and that the church in her early history did set a positive example of striving to implement the teaching of the apostle in I Timothy 3:11, I Timothy 5:9-10, and I Corinthians 7.

We continue our survey now, limiting our comments to churches that are rooted in the Reformation.

John Calvin's teaching and the practice of the church in Geneva

That John Calvin was influential in organizing the church's government and setting the pattern for the church's life is a well-known fact. Specifically, his

influence in regards to women assisting the deacons cannot be overlooked in our historical survey.

That God permitted women to assist the deacons, Calvin taught in his comments on I Timothy 3:11 and 5:9, as well as in his *Institutes*.

I Timothy 3:11, in the midst of the qualifications for the office of deacon, reads: "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." Regarding this passage, Calvin wrote: "He means the wives both of deacons and of bishops, for they must be aids to their husbands in their office; which cannot be, unless their behaviour excel that of others."¹

I Timothy 5:9 says, "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man"; while verse 10 continues to list the qualifications of the women of whom Paul is speaking. In a previous article, we quoted some of Calvin's comments on this verse; but to have them before us we quote again, and more fully:

He again points out what kind of widows should be taken under

the care of the Church.... First, he describes the age, sixty years; for, being supported at the public expense, it was proper that they should have already reached old age. Besides, there was another and stronger reason; for they consecrated themselves to the ministry of the Church, which would have been altogether intolerable, if there were still a likelihood of their being married. They were received on the condition that the Church should relieve their poverty, and that, on their part, they should be employed in ministering to the poor, as far as the state of their health allowed. Thus there was a mutual obligation between them and the church.²

In his *Institutes*, Calvin expresses his understanding that Scripture speaks of two kinds of deacons.

The care of the poor was entrusted to the deacons. However, two kinds are mentioned in the letter to the Romans: "He that gives, let him do it with simplicity...he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness" [Rom. 12:8, cf. Vg.]. Since it is certain that Paul is speaking of the public office of the church, there must have been two distinct grades. Unless my judgment deceive me, in the first clause he designates the deacons who distribute the alms. But the second refers to those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

Previous article in this series: October 15, 2009, p. 36.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, transl. Rev. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989 reprint), p. 87.

² Calvin, *Commentaries*, p. 128.

and sick. Of this sort were the widows whom Paul mentions to Timothy [I Tim. 5:9-10]. Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor.³

Two things are important to understand here. First, Calvin divides the diaconate into two categories, not by *gender* (men in one and women in the other), but by the *scope of their work* – the one kind distribute the alms, the other care for the poor and sick. Second, Calvin does not mean that the second class of deacons consisted *exclusively* of women; in fact, some men also devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick. Rather, he means that the *first* category consisted exclusively of *men*, and that any role *women* played in the work of mercy was limited to the *second* category. Says Brian Schwertley,

For Calvin, the authoritative aspects of being a deacon...are reserved for the men deacons alone. The women deacons function somewhat like nurses. The food, water, clothing, and medicine, etc., set aside by the deacons are delivered and administered by the deaconesses. This does not mean that deacons were not involved in similar activities. It only means that deaconesses were limited to separate non-authoritative activities.⁴

Schwertley then notes that, whereas the church fathers limited the deaconesses to working with women only, Calvin allowed the women assistants to minister to men as well.

Calvin also responds to those who argue that on the basis of

I Timothy 5:9, nuns are to take vows of celibacy and chastity. Our concern is not to note all his arguments, but to see that in this connection he taught that the widows of I Timothy 5:9 served in the church. After saying in *Institutes* 4.13.18 that such widows were “received into public ministry,” Calvin says in 4.13.19:

But how is it lawful to apply this passage of Paul to nuns? For deaconesses were created not to appease God with songs or unintelligible mumbling, not to live the rest of the time in idleness, but to discharge the public ministry of the church toward the poor and to strive with all zeal, constancy, and diligence in the task of love.⁵

The church in Geneva implemented Calvin’s view by allowing women to work in the hospital. (Remember that the hospital was under the oversight of the diaconate, and that the *hospitallier*, the one who oversaw the day-to-day operations, was a deacon—see *Standard Bearer* vol. 82, pp. 303ff.) The diaconal account books of the church in Geneva indicate that women “were active as donors, hostesses, landladies, nurses, and recommenders of the poor to the deacons,” that many women helped those served by the “Funds,” and specifically that the widows cared for orphans supported by the “Funds” (see *Standard Bearer*, vol. 82, pp. 320ff.).⁶

Other Reformers and Reformed Churches

Calvin was not the only Reformer to teach this, nor did one find women assisting the deacons only in Geneva.

That Heinrich Bullinger (in

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, pp. 1273 and 1274.

⁶ Jeannine E. Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse francaise* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1989), pp. 80-81.

Zurich), Philip Melanchthon (Luther’s assistant and successor, in Germany), and Theodore Beza (Calvin’s successor in Geneva) taught the same, Elsie Anne McKee demonstrates.⁷

Peter Y. DeJong notes that the first mention of “deaconesses” (in the sense outlined by Calvin) “is found in the Reformed churches in the principality of Sedan in France, where a society known as the ‘demoiselles de charite’ devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick,” and goes on to speak of other Reformed synods that spoke to the matter, and congregations that implemented such.⁸

The Articles of Wesel, 1568, said, “In those places where it is convenient we are of the opinion that women of proven faith and pious walk and who are of an advanced age, according to the example of the Apostles, can also be admitted to this office.” Which office? The statement is made in chapter five, “Concerning the Deacons,” and is made after making a twofold distinction in the office, as Calvin had done. Women were permitted to be admitted to the office of deacon in its second kind, who were “in the main to care for the sick, the wounded and the prisoners.”⁹

DeJong traces the development of the thinking of Reformed churches on this subject over the

⁷ Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1984), pp. 212, 213, and 219.

⁸ Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), pp. 242-243.

⁹ Richard R. DeRidder, *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual including the decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other significant matters relating to the government of the churches*, by P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuyper (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), pp. 33 and 34.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, transl. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 2, p. 1061.

⁴ Brian M. Schwertley, *A Historical and Biblical Examination of Women Deacons* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, 1998), p. 32.

next 15 years or so. In 1575, the *Church Order* (presumably that of Wesel) required the consistory to choose four deaconesses of any age. In 1580 the Classis of Wesel decided that if the Reformed churches were to implement the help of women, they should follow the requirements set forth by Paul, choosing widows for that purpose. Then in 1581 the Synod of Middelburg dealt with the issue:

16. Whether it would be advisable to re-introduce the office of deaconess? Answer: No, because of various inconveniences which might follow therefrom. But in times of pestilence or other diseases, if there is any service to be done for sick women, not fitting for [male] deacons, they shall provide it by their wives or by others qualified for this.¹⁰

Notwithstanding this decision, the congregation at Amsterdam permitted a body of women to serve the deacons, and a “few other churches also made use of the services of women, such as the congregations of Emden and Utrecht, but never was such work regarded as strictly official.”¹¹

But after the 1500s we do not read of such anymore. Was the practice so commonplace, that nothing more was said about it? Or did it die out? The latter, apparently. Lambert Daneau wrote this in 1577, regarding the lack of widows assisting the deacons: “For in this our age, in all reformed churches, the use of this rule and precept is lacking. From which it appears that things which pertain to a particular polity of the church, and have been established and received only for reason of times or places or persons, are not permanent.”¹² In other words, Paul laid down a

rule that may be used as needed, but is not obligatory on the churches.

No doubt one reason why this practice died out is that civil governments began taking over more of the work of the church, including the relief of the poor and care of the sick. Another, suggested by Emile Doumergue, is that “cautious men...feared the ‘inconveniences’ of this innovation.”¹³

The nineteenth century to the present.

In the last two centuries, the idea of having deaconesses has again come to the fore in Christian churches. Various Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and Mennonite denominations permit women to become deaconesses (sometimes, but not always, distinct from the office of deacon), and to serve especially in teaching and in medical work. A detailed examination of the role of women in the work of mercy in the last two centuries is both impossible and unnecessary for our purposes.¹⁴ We limit our remaining remarks to Reformed churches.

Peter DeJong notes that “within recent years the Re-

formed Churches in the Netherlands have again awakened to the realization of the important place which women can and ought to fill in the ministry of mercy.”¹⁵ However, among confessionally and faithfully Reformed churches in North America, I know of none that have an official policy regarding women assisting the deacons, or a structured approach regarding the same.

The only significant development in the last two centuries within North American, confessionally Reformed denominations is the departure by some from the scriptural principle that men only may serve in church office—a principle determined and revealed by God Himself, requiring the church to submit to God’s will in this regard. Women have served as deacons in the Reformed Church in America since 1972,¹⁶ and the Christian Reformed Church in North America first allowed women to serve as deacons in 1984.¹⁷

Reformed churches must continue to exclude women from the office of deacon. This is not to ignore or despise the gifts of women; it is simply to continue to be faithful to God’s Word. God Himself knows the gifts of mercy and compassion that He has given to women in the church, and provides a way for such gifts to be used for the church as a whole. The way is not that women serve as deacons, but that they serve as assistants to the deacons.

What remains to be done, then, is further to defend such an idea, and to give some ideas as to how it could be implemented.



¹³. As summarized by McKee, p. 221.

¹⁴. The interested reader can find an exhaustive and scholarly study of this topic by reading chapters 5-8 of Jeannine E. Olson’s book *Deacons and Deaconesses Through the Centuries* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005). Specifically regarding the position and work of deaconesses in Baptist churches, one can confer Charles W. DeWeese’s book *Women Deacons and Deaconesses: 400 Years of Baptist Service* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005). For an older work that treats the position and work of deaconesses in Lutheran churches, one can read Frederick S. Weiser’s book *Love’s Response: A Story of Lutheran Deaconesses in America* (Philadelphia, PA: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1962).

¹⁰. DeRidder, p. 129.

¹¹. DeJong, p. 243.

¹². As quoted in McKee, pp. 219-220.

¹⁵. DeJong, pp. 244-245.

¹⁶. <http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=3838>

¹⁷. http://www.crcna.org/pages/positions_women_office.cfm

The Seasons of Our Lives

The seniors of the Protestant Reformed Churches first heard of a Seniors' Retreat by way of a bulletin announcement on February 24, 2008. Response to that announcement revealed that there was in fact sufficient interest among the seniors of the denomination for such a retreat.

Though the idea of a seniors' retreat had been considered for several years, it was the Loveland PRC that took the initiative to lay the groundwork. A committee from Loveland put in hours and hours of planning and much hard work to make the idea of a seniors' retreat become a reality. The dates for the retreat were set for October 1-6, 2009, and the place chosen was the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado.

When the time arrived, people traveled from as far north as Edmonton, Alberta; as far southwest as Redlands, California; and as far east as Wingham, Ontario—by car, airplane, motor home, and tour bus. Many of those who rode the tour bus started the trip at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan. The bus made two stops along the way to pick up a few people at Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Illinois and others in Omaha, Nebraska. To help pass the time on the long two-day trip,

a keyboard had been brought along to accompany singing by the bus passengers. The fifty-five people who rode the tour bus had a very memorable experience.

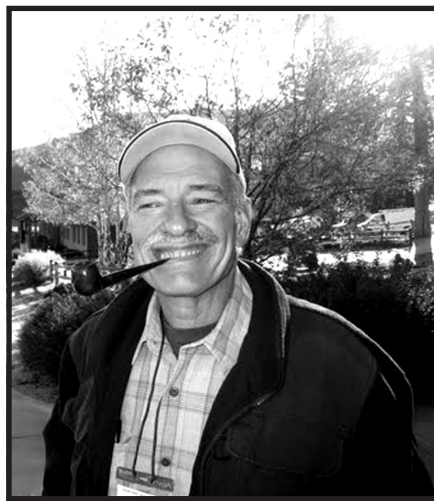
When the seniors arrived at the camp to check in, the weather was cold and windy, but the warm welcome extended by the Loveland committee made up for the cold and blustery weather. While at the retreat we experienced a sampling of the weather that we have in the four seasons—cold, wind, snow, rain, and sunshine—which fit in with the retreat theme: "Seasons of Our Lives."

The ages of the "retreaters" ranged from those in the autumn years of their lives, 40 to 60 years (the youngest being 46), to those in the winter years, 60 to 80 years, and those older than fourscore (the oldest being over 85 years), which reminds us of the words of

Psalms 90:10, which states, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

Among the highlights of the retreat were the speeches and sermons we were privileged to hear. The speeches dealt with the seasons of our lives. One of the speakers divided the seasons of our lives into the following four categories: Springtime—ages 0 to 20; Summer—ages 20 to 40; Autumn—ages 40 to 60; and Winter—ages 60-80. Following are the speakers and the Bible passages they focused on for their speeches or sermons. On Friday, Rev. S. Key presented the topic the "Springtime of Our lives," focusing on Isaiah 5:10, 11. On Saturday morning, Rev. R. VanOverloop presented the topic the "Summer of Our Lives," based on Titus 2. On Sunday, members of the Council of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church supervised the worship services at the YMCA camp. Rev. R. VanOverloop preached for us on Sunday morning, using as his text Philippians 3:13, 14. Prof. H. Hanks preached at our Sunday afternoon worship service on the "Autumn of Our Lives," using Proverbs 16:31.

We were truly edified and blessed as we worshiped amidst the handiwork of our God in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. This setting brought to mind Psalm 125:2, which states, "As the mountains are round about



*Dave Poortinga,
Retreat chairman*

Written by the retreaters from Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.

Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even forever." On Monday morning Rev. R. Miersma read Ecclesiastes 12 and called our attention to Isaiah 46:4 in speaking of the "Winter of Our Lives." (In connection with the speech of Rev. Miersma, we call your attention to two things. First, this was the first time he spoke publicly since his most recent stroke and subsequent surgery, and second, his speech is printed in the November 15, 2009, issue of the *Standard Bearer*.)

Following each speech and Prof. Hanko's sermon, we had time for a coffee break and fellowship. We then separated into four discussion groups; each group being led by one of the men attending the retreat. The discussions, in which many people participated, were stimulating and beneficial for us in our Christian walk.

After the Sunday evening discussion groups, a singspiration was held. It was wonderful that so many people from so many different churches could join in singing the songs we love and know so well. "O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation" (Ps. 95:1). Singing was an important part of the retreat. The previous evening, which was Saturday, we enjoyed singing, from memory, praises to God as



The dining hall

we were gathered around a bonfire in the chilly mountain air.

Other evenings were spent in viewing elk, enjoying a time of good Christian fellowship with old and new friends from other churches, playing games, or having a cup of coffee together in the large fellowship room in one of the lodges. Pictures were taken of all aspects of the retreat, and these were shown on Monday evening, followed by members of the Faith Protestant Reformed Church presenting a "Burma Shave" program. (Let that speak for itself!)

Another activity that stands out in the minds of the retreaters was our trips to the cafeteria three times a day. At mealtimes

speaking of food—members of the congregation in Loveland had baked 150 dozen, yes DOZEN, cookies and bars for our coffee breaks, and another fifty dozen cookies were purchased in Michigan and donated. Surprisingly, only five dozen in all were left at the end of the retreat.

Many thanks to the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church for all their hard work and dedication in planning this retreat and making it a reality. Because the retreat ran so smoothly, it may have looked as if organizing and running the retreat must have been a relatively easy task, but we know it was time-consuming and that it required great effort and much work.

It is hoped that in the future we will be able to hold another Seniors' Retreat, the Lord willing.

Above all, we thank our God for safe travel, for the opportunity to renew old and make new acquaintances, and for making this an enjoyable and spiritually beneficial time for everyone. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).



And what a variety of food awaited us. It was so good and so plentiful. And,



Take Time to Be Holy

Reformed Witness Hour

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

What do you want in the coming year? Take time to search your heart. The heart of man (yours and mine) is always focused on something. What is it? If you could be given one thing, what would you want it to be?

Is it in terms of the earthly: money, things, advance in business? Is it in terms of pleasure: good times, friends, excitement? Is it in terms of personal satisfaction: weight-loss, beauty? Is it in terms of the alleviation of burdens, difficulties (mental and physical), which have become so wearisome and you are tired of carrying them?

Or is it holiness? Is it to be like Jesus? Do you want to be separate from sin and the wicked world, its obscenities and pornography? Do you want to grow in your life of obedience to God? Do you want to be more devoted, not to yourself, but to God—to have the Holy Spirit cut out your pride and humble you, show you your sins, and make you more sincere, pure, and clean of heart?

This is the Lord Jesus' prayer for His children in 2010. We read of it in John 17:17, in the prayer of Jesus Christ to His Father: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

Our Lord Jesus Christ looks at the coming year and all of its purposes in terms of one thing: that we might be partakers of His

holiness. He has one desire, one reason for giving you another day: that you might grow in the gift of holiness. He prays, "Father, make them holy. Make them like Me." Is that your desire for the coming year?

As we enter this year and we ask the question: Why am I on this earth in the year 2010? our God says, there is one reason. That reason is the work of God in conforming His children to Jesus Christ, separating them from this world and its sins. That goal, that purpose, is sanctification, which means to grow in holiness. Is this what you want desperately in 2010?

In John 17 we have the most beautiful prayer that was ever spoken on earth. It was Jesus' prayer before the cross, His prayer for His own, for those who were given to Him by His Father out of the world. Although Jesus prayed this prayer a few hours *before* the cross, He prays already from the point of view of the *victory of the cross* and all that that victory would mean. He realizes that soon He will leave us in an evil world, a world that seeks, under the leadership of Satan, to destroy the very work of God if it could. Although His disciples (you and I, His church) would be in this world and be subject to severe dangers, to deep hatred, to powerful temptations, He does not pray that we be taken out of the world. No. He says that we have a task. In chapter 15:27 He said, "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

So the Savior prays: "Father,

do not take them out of the world but keep them in the world. Sanctify them, make them holy by means of Thy word as they are now in this world. Set them apart from the world by holy living. Do not whisk them away from the world, but cause that, in heart and in mind, in thoughts and in deeds, in words and in actions, they may live more and more in obedience unto Thee in holiness."

The Savior adds other petitions in the verses that follow in John 17, petitions that throb with His love, revealing the great things of His heart for you and me. He prays that we might be united and be one as His people. He prays that we might be with Him and behold His glory. But, you see, all of this is dependent upon a basic petition: Father, make them holy.

People of God, we cannot love and dwell in unity unless we are committed to holiness, mortifying our pride. We cannot desire to be with Jesus and see His beauty in heaven if His beauty does not dominate our hearts now. Thus Jesus prays, "Father, here is My request for those whom Thou hast given to Me, for those whom I have redeemed with My own blood: Make them more and more holy. Bring them into the realm of Thy truth."

When Jesus prays, "Sanctify them," He means, "Make them holy." This is a work of God in which He conforms us to the pattern or image of His Son. It involves two things: it means that you are set apart for God, for God's service, for God's use. Is that not marvelous? Holiness

Rev. Haak is pastor of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan and radio pastor for the Reformed Witness Hour, on which this message was aired.

of life means that you say from your heart, "I have been set aside for my Master's use and service. I am on this earth, not for my enjoyment, but to give pleasure to the living and the true God."

But it means also another thing. Not only to be set apart for God, but also to be separated from all that contaminates and perverts spiritually, all that would spiritually separate you from God. The world of sin and the devil come along and they say: "Your body is for pleasure. Your eyes are for lust. Your dates are for sex. Your work is for greed." And God says, "No! Your life, in all of its being, is for holiness." God says to the world, "Hands off! This one belongs to Me, in soul and in mind."

"Father, sanctify them. Father, set them apart for Thy service. Separate them from the world of sin. Dress them, in their body and in their soul, with My holiness. Do Thy work in them. Grant them conformity to My image, that they may walk as children of the King in this world." That is Christ's prayer for His children in [2010]. Do you pray it with Him?

What does your heart whisper in prayer as you look forward to the coming year? Do you pray: "Let me go my way. Grant me my passions. Make my way smooth. Remove hardships." Or do you pray, "Make me more spiritual. Make me more holy. Make me more pure in my imaginations. Make me like Christ in deed and in word. Father, one thing I desire, no matter the cost in terms of my own ease and comfort: Carry on Thy work of grace in my heart and in my life. Cause it to go farther and higher. Make me holy in body, soul, and spirit. Make me like Jesus."

Is that what you want in the coming year?

This prayer of Jesus Christ was very urgent. The whole prayer in John 17 is filled with

divine intensity. It is uttered out of the infinite love of Jesus Christ and in a complete understanding of our need. He sees us in this world which is evil. We do not see the world for what it is. We have rose-colored glasses. We do not see the world filled with devils and snares and pits and brimstone. But He does. He sees that we who are His impressionable, foolish, arrogant children must live in that world. And Satan will be after us. So He prays for holiness, personal holiness, for a tender heart toward God and a zeal for God's honor as the only thing of necessity for us in this coming year.

Still more, we have been assigned a task in [2010]. That task is to witness to His name, to His truth, in our personal lives, before our neighbors, and as a congregation of Jesus Christ. But vital for our witness in this world is holiness of life. We cannot bring forth that witness unless we who do that witnessing are conformed more and more unto Christ. The proof of Christianity is not your arguments, not your intellectual talk. We carry the message of the truth to an unbelieving world *in our living*. We must be a special people to the Lord our God. Men may haggle about what you say to them. But there is no one who can dispute the evidence of a holy and God-centered life.

The heart of our Savior desires our good. And so He prays: Sanctify them. We do not know what we need to be happy. Most often when we get what we thought would make us happy, we end up more miserable. Holiness, however, is happiness. That sounds strange, does it not? So far from the experience of a sinner! To be holy in desires, to be loving and forgiving and close to the heart of God—this is happi-

ness. Holiness is the key to the enjoyment of spiritual things. The pure in heart—they shall see God.

How then shall we be holy? Father, sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy Word is truth.

God's method of working holiness is through the Scriptures—the word of truth, God's infallible word. The holy Scriptures are God's tool for the sanctification of His children in [2010]. Would you be like Jesus? Would you walk with the Lord? Then, take up and read the Scriptures. The Bible.

The truth of the Scriptures, the doctrines set forth in the Bible—there is the power unto godliness and unto holiness. Holiness is a process worked by God through knowledge of the truth of the word of God.

Thy word, says Jesus, is truth. The root meaning of the word "truth" is reality. God is true. He is a God of truth. Reality is the living and the true God revealed in the Bible. The God who speaks in the Bible is reality. Apart from Him there is no

truth. And God has made known His truth in the Scriptures. The written and inspired Bible is the truth. Oh, what a word to us in this world of darkness and confusion, in this world in which men are at sea without a compass, and without a paddle, prating about their wisdom. This is the truth—the living and abiding word of God. God's word is truth.

And it is the power to transform us unto holiness. Through the truth, God produces holiness. Did you get that? Leaving the ones whom He has saved in this world; leaving them as a flock of sheep in a dog pen; leaving them as sinners with their foolish and corrupt nature; leaving them in a world filled with devils and their own flesh teaming up against

*...vital for
our witness
in this world
is holiness of life.*

them—the Savior prays that they be a holy people, separated to God. The Savior prays that we may endure unto the end, that we may witness to His name, that we may remain unspotted from the world, that we may confess the name of our Savior.

How is this going to be accomplished? Does He pray, “Father, if this is going to be, You had better surround them with a legion of angels with flaming swords”? No, He does not pray that. Does He pray, “Father, remove them into a separate colony, that they may escape the influences of the world”? No, He does not pray that! He prays, “Father, make them holy in this world through thy truth. Thy word is truth.” The word of God is the power, invincible power, unto holiness of life.

But that word must be applied by the Holy Spirit. It must be applied to our heart and to our life. You must read the Holy Scriptures yourself, personally. As you read the Scriptures, you will come to a deeper understanding of God. You will come to a deeper understanding of yourself and your sin. The reading of the Bible will humble you. The reading of the Bible, if it is effective in your life, will cause you to bend your proud knee. The reading of the Bible will give your eye to catch the shafts of light that come from the throne of God. Read also sound theological books. Attend to the solid, sound preaching of the word of God. Do not let your seat be vacant on Sunday. Meditate, come apart, rest in the holy Scriptures.


In [2010] the world will run

at a faster pace than ever before. For the end draws near. And the maddening pace increases. Do not allow the world to govern your time. Bring yourselves to the Scriptures daily, repeatedly, time after time. Hide God’s word in your heart.

What do you want in [2010]?

What will the record concerning you that is kept in God’s book in heaven reveal of your days in this coming year?

What are you after? Are you after the holiness of Jesus? Do you want to be a child of the King? Do you want to be like Jesus? Is that your desire? Do you pray, “Lord, give me holiness”?

God will hear that prayer. You will have it. For Jesus prayed this, and the Father will never deny the petition of His Son. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

The Consistory of the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, sponsored an open forum question and answer meeting on November 30 at 2:00 P.M. at the Quezon City Circle Park. All the men of the Berean congregation were invited to this meeting, as well as the male members from the First Reformed Church of Tondo, the First Reformed Church of Bulacan, the Christian Faith Ministry of Batasan Hills, and some other recent contacts. The Berean congregation prayed that, with the Lord’s blessing and the guidance of His Spirit, this meeting would help answer some significant questions and help the men get to know each other better in the fellowship of Christ and His truth.

At its last meeting, and ac-

cording to the congregation’s expressed desire at their last general assembly meeting, the Consistory of the Berean PRC also appointed a Building Committee to do some preliminary study on long-range planning and feasibility for a possible future congregational worship and weekly activity building, the Lord willing.

The members of the First PRC in Holland, MI met together on December 4 for a potluck dinner, as a send-off for Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn as they planned to leave for the Philippines on December 16, D.V. The Kleyns planned to give a presentation on the work in the Philippines, and a collection was taken for Psalters for the Berean PRC.

The men of the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, South Dakota approved a motion to proceed to Classis West, meeting March 3, 2010 in Loveland, CO D.V., with a request to organize. The necessary paperwork will

now be put in order and submitted to their calling church, the Edgerton, MN PRC, and to the Domestic Mission Committee. As churches we are thankful for God’s blessing upon the work in Sioux Falls and pray for His Spirit to guide them as they prepare for this exciting event.

Rev. Kenneth Koole, pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC, was scheduled to arrive back from his six-week stay in Singapore and the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, on November 30. Elder Sid Miedema from the Contact Committee flew home with him. Saturday, November 28, Rev. Koole gave his final two Reformation speeches dealing with modern-day errors and the importance and relevance of the Reformed confessions for the twenty-first century church. Rev. James Laning, pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI, gave two speeches on Friday, dealing with the importance of Scripture

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

and the doctrines of grace for the church today. Both preached a sermon on Sunday. Rev. Laning and Elder John Van Baren are going on to Myanmar to continue to assist the work there with Pastor Titus and the churches he pastors. Good discussion on working toward a sister-church relation took place. Reports will be prepared and presented to Synod 2010 recommending what needs to take place for this to be accomplished.

Covenant ERCS has just purchased a place for worship, an 8,000 sq/ft floor in a factory for about \$1.5 million US, which will require extensive renovation. They hope to have it ready by the end of January. The saints of Covenant also expressed their appreciation to Grandville PRC for releasing their pastor for six Sundays. They continue to covet our prayers for their development and perseverance in the faith.

Evangelism Activities

The Reformed Witness Committee of our churches in Iowa and Minnesota has created a channel on YouTube that can be accessed at www.youtube.com/ReformedWitness. As of right now, the committee has the Reformation Lectures of 2008 and 2009 added to this channel, as well as the lecture given by Prof. Russell Dykstra on "Upholding the Formula of Subscription." More lectures and sermons will be added in the future.

Also, all eight of the DVD's of the Calvin Conference, sponsored by our seminary, can now be watched on-line at www.youtube.com/cprcni.

Congregation Activities

The Deacons of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI and the Hudsonville, MI PRC once again collected donations this past November for the needy within their respective congrega-

tions. Congregation members could either place money or gift-card certificates in collection plates or give to a deacon, or drop off food donations in their church kitchen.

On November 19 the senior and retired members of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI got together for their annual Autumn Dinner. The Helping Hands Committee of Faith hosted the event.

The ladies of the Covenant Ladies Circle of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada invited all the ladies and their daughters to enjoy their annual Christmas Cookie Exchange in late November. The concept is simple enough, you bring three dozen cookies/bars to exchange for a variety of other cookies and bars. Sounds good!

The Consistory of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI recently approved holding an occasional brief song-service before their Sunday evening worship service. They are scheduled for every other month on the first Sunday of the month. The first such service was scheduled for Sunday, December 6.


The Consistory of the Hull, IA PRC made a change in their second worship service, begin-

ning December 6. After singing the first Psalter number, the congregation will now remain standing as they recite, in unison, the Apostles' Creed and as they sing the second Psalter number.

Minister Activities

The November 29 bulletin from the Loveland, CO PRC included the following from their pastor, Rev. Rodney Miersma. "In light of the recent strokes and the fainting spell of last Sunday, and ongoing health problems, with the possibility of more strokes in the future, I have made the decision to retire from the full-time active ministry of the Word and sacraments, effective immediately...." We echo Rev. Miersma when he adds, "May the Lord be with us as we make the transition to retirement. 'Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: Wait, I say, on the Lord' (Ps. 27:14)."

Rev. Carl Haak declined the call he was considering to become pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC.

The Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI extended a call to Rev. Garrett Eriks to serve as their next pastor. 

Announcements

NOTICE:

The New Church Building Committee of the PRC of South Holland is soliciting for private, unsecured 5-year loans to fund the construction of a new church building. These notes will bear interest at a rate of 4 percent per annum, with interest to be paid semi-annually, and principal due in full at maturity. Interested parties should contact Eric Ophoff (708-205-3568) or Steve VanDrunen (708-732-1300) for further details.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of Hudsonville PRC expresses Christian sympathy to member Donna Boven in the death of her brother

HIB KUIPER.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever" (Psalm 125:1-2).

Seminarian Brian Huizinga,
President

Pat Lanning, Secretary

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 Men's Society of Trinity PRC expresses heartfelt sympathy to Bev Kuiper and family in the death of their loved one,

HILBERT KUIPER.

"For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Romans 14:9).

Terry Dykstra, President
Tim Bleyenbergh, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Calvary PRC, Hull IA, extend their Christian sympathy to Art and Mary Bleyenbergh in the death of Art's father,

ART BLEYENBERG, SR.

May they find comfort in the words of Revelation 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Rev. Cory Griess, President
Marv VanDenTop, Vice-All

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Trinity PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to Bev Kuiper and family in the death of their husband, father, and grandfather and our fellow officebearer

MR. HIB KUIPER,

who was taken into glory on Monday, November 16, 2009. May we who are left on this side of the grave be comforted with the words found in Psalm 116:5: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints," and in John 14: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Council of Trinity PRC

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to Aric and Rachel Bleyenbergh and their children in the death of their grandfather,

MR. ART BLEYENBERG.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:6).

Ken Elzinga, Vice-President
Dale Bartelds, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Genny Machiele in the death of her husband,

MR. PAUL MACHIELE.

May she find comfort in the words of the apostle, "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:51, 52, 54b).

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

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Adult Bible Society of Trinity PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to their fellow society members, Bev Kuiper, Steve and Rosie Bylsma, Hib and Missy Kuiper, and Matt and Jessica Dykstra in the passing of their husband, father, and uncle,

HIB KUIPER.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelations 14:13).

Mark Hoeksema, President
Heather Dykstra, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour

January 2010

Date	Topic	Text
January 3	"Our God and Guide for 2010"	Psalm 48:14
January 10	"The Privilege and Necessity of Prayer"	Luke 11:1
January 17	"Praying to Our Heavenly Father"	Luke 11:2
January 24	"Hallowed Be Thy Name"	Luke 11:2
January 31	"May God's Kingdom Come!"	Luke 11:2