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In This Issue

- ◆ *Secret Things* 338
- ◆ *Marriage, Divorce, and Children (3)* 341
- ◆ *The Millennium (2)* 343
- ◆ *The Practice of Godliness* 346
- ◆ *The Congregation's Calling
to Support the Ministry of the Gospel (2)* 349
- ◆ *Rome and Politics (7)* 352
- ◆ *The Coming of the Son of Man* 355
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* 358

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Secret Things

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29

Deuteronomy 29 is part of the final instructions that Moses gave to Israel before their entering into the land of Canaan.

This chapter begins with Moses reminding Israel of the loving care God had shown to them during their forty years of wilderness wanderings. God had provided them bread and water. God had provided them with clothes that did not wear out. God had also protected them from their enemies.

Moses then called the people to faithfulness. With their entering into Canaan, Israel was entering into a new phase of the cov-

enant that the LORD God had with them. Israel must be faithful to the LORD and His covenant. They must especially guard against idolatry. Should they be unfaithful, the LORD would judge them, and the land would be consumed before them.

Our focus is on the last verse of this chapter. It makes a contrast between secret things and those things that are revealed. The secret things belong to the LORD our God; whereas the revealed things belong to us and our children. The revealed things have been given that we and our children may do all the words of the law.

How important it is that we come to know the revealed things and then teach them to our children!



A contrast is made between the secret things and the revealed things.

The secret things are the secrets of God. Everything about God is secret, unless He reveals

it to us. This is because God is infinitely exalted above the entire creation. He is so exalted above us that without revelation He is completely unknowable. This is true of His existence. This is true of His purpose to save a people in Jesus Christ. This is true of His purpose to destroy the rest of humanity in the way of their sin.

And God does reveal Himself.

He reveals Himself in the creation.

But He reveals Himself more clearly in Jesus Christ as Jehovah, the God of the covenant. The term "LORD our God" found in this passage places us in the context of the covenant. The term "LORD," in the original, is "Jehovah." This is God's covenant name. In the covenant, Jehovah becomes our God. As our God, Jehovah has eternally determined our salvation in Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate purpose of all that He has predetermined in His counsel. This glorious purpose of salvation Jehovah has revealed throughout history. This revela-

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tion began with Adam and was completed with the visions given to the apostle John on the island of Patmos. This revelation has also been infallibly preserved in Scripture by divine inspiration.

But even though God has revealed Himself to us, He has not revealed all there is to know about Him. There are many things about God and His work that remain secret. There are good reasons for this. First, our finite minds cannot grasp all there is to know of God. Only God can fully know Himself. Besides, there are things that are coming, as determined by God's counsel, that are better for us not to know. This includes the day of the Lord's return, the day of our own death, as well as all the evils that await us in life.

Yet God has revealed Himself sufficiently for us to know Him as the God of the covenant, find His salvation in Jesus Christ, and live within His covenant.



When Moses in this final address to Israel spoke of the revealed and secret things, he had some very definite things in mind.

The things revealed refers to the revelation that Jehovah had given up to this point in history. This includes all the covenant promises given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Included also were all the saving works that Jehovah had accomplished up until this point to preserve His covenant people. We think of such great works as the destruction of the world in the flood, Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, and Israel's preservation in the wilderness. The revelation of God, however, was dominated by the Mosaic law given at Mt. Sinai to regulate Israel's life in the covenant. This law consisted of the moral law that guided Israel's behavior generally. It also consisted of

civil and ceremonial laws that proclaimed the salvation of God and pointed Israel ahead to the coming Savior. The Mosaic law also spoke of the blessings that would come upon Israel in the way of covenant faithfulness and the chastening of the LORD in the way of covenant unfaithfulness.

Moses had recorded these revealed things by the inspiration of God in the Pentateuch.

In contrast to these revealed things were the secret things of Jehovah. These most likely were the exact execution of the blessing and judgment of which Moses had spoken in his final discourse with Israel. Deuteronomy 27-30 records Moses' discourse with Israel in which he emphasized both the blessing that would come to Israel in the way of covenant faithfulness and the judgment that would come to her in the way of unfaithfulness. Jehovah in His wisdom did not reveal to Israel exactly when and how these blessing and judgments would come upon her. These details became plain to Israel only as history unfolded.

God's revelation through Moses was incomplete. We now have the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Over the course of the Old Testament the LORD added to the revelation that Moses and Israel had. This revelation was still dominated by the law and continued to promise greater things to come in the Savior. Then God completed His revelation by sending the promised Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament. He came as the Son of God into our flesh. He gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people. He has been exalted into heavenly glory to bless the church with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and to make all things ready for His final return and the full salvation of the church. All these great works of salvation are

recorded in the New Testament Scriptures.

This revelation includes promises for God's covenant blessings to those who are faithful to God's covenant. It also contains warnings of judgment to those who are unfaithful.

But, again, the details of these blessings and judgments remain a secret.



The revealed things belong to us and our children.

God has revealed Himself and the realities of the covenant in Jesus Christ for our salvation. The salvation of the covenant is by faith alone in Jesus Christ. And faith is knowledge. It is a personal, intimate knowledge of God in Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation. It is a knowledge that leads us to embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior and put all our trust in Him for time and eternity. But it is a faith that requires the revelation of God. We cannot know God intimately as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ, unless we first know about Him. The revealed things are for us, therefore, that we may know God by faith and lay hold of His salvation.

How important, then, to be a student of Scripture and to come under the pure preaching of the Word.

Notice that the revealed things belong also to our children. This is in keeping with the fact that God's covenant is with believers and their children. God's revelation is also for the salvation of the children of the covenant. For that reason parents of the covenant are duty bound to instruct their children in the revelation of God. Godly parents are to provide this instruction in their homes and through the church. It is wise also for parents to provide this same instruction for their children in Christian schools.

And let us remember that this instruction must contain also the realities emphasized in this discourse of Moses to Israel. There is blessing only in the way of faithfulness to God's covenant, and judgment in the way of unfaithfulness.

But the secret things still belong to Jehovah God.

This passage has been wrongly applied to the eternal decrees of God, especially His decree of predestination. The claim is that, since predestination belongs to the decrees of God, it belongs to the secret things of God. We ought therefore not to concern ourselves with it, especially in the preaching. This perspective is usually promoted by those who do not want the truth of predestination and God's sovereignty. In response, we point out that whereas God has not revealed everything about His eternal decrees, He has revealed much about them. And He has revealed the fact that He has eternally predetermined the eternal destiny of all men and angels. He has also revealed that His decree of predestination is twofold, i.e., election and reprobation. He has revealed that predestination is unconditionally sovereign, so that election is not based on foreseen faith and good works. Rather faith and good works are the fruit of His election. These are part of the revealed things to us that we must know and embrace. They must also be preached to us as an integral part of the gospel.

But there are many secrets that God keeps from us. Some concern His being and life as the triune God. Some concern His sovereignty and our accountability. Some concern what the future holds as determined by His counsel. Many of these secret things may be revealed in the future. Certainly the counsel of God will be revealed to us as it unfolds. And in eternity we will come to know more of the being

and works of God. But for the present these things are not for us to know.

As to what the LORD our God has kept from us, we must live by faith. We are not to pry into the secret things of God with all sorts of curiosity and speculation. Rather, by faith we must trust that there is a good explanation for things we cannot as yet understand of God and may never understand. By faith we must trust that the LORD is fair and just in all His ways, even though we are not able to see it. And we must trust the LORD to bless us abundantly in the way of faithfulness.



That we may do all the words of this law.

The law to which Moses referred was the entire law given at Mt. Sinai. This law was given to regulate Israel's life in the covenant.

Faithfulness to the covenant meant doing all the words of this law.

Only as Israel did all the words of this law would she receive the great blessings of the covenant.

This is not to be understood in the context of works righteousness. The law (especially the ceremonial laws) pointed Israel to Christ, so that doing the words of the law focused on clinging to and living out of the promised Christ.

The great blessings of the covenant are still found today in faithfulness to this law.

Much of that Mosaic law has fallen away with the coming of Christ. This is true of maintaining the tabernacle and the Aaronitic priesthood, offering up bloody sacrifices, and celebrating the Old Testament feast days. Yet the law's essence remains. The essence of the Old Testament tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices, and feast days remain, in that we are to cling to Jesus Christ by faith and live out of Him. The moral law of the ten commandments still remains as a guide for the life we are to live in Jesus Christ.

Only as we do the words of the law will we find the blessings of the covenant.

The things revealed are given to us so that we will do all the words of the law and find the blessings of the covenant.

Let us then with an eager heart of faith turn our attention to the revealed things of God. Let us with our children attend the church of God where this revelation is faithfully preached. Let us study this revelation in our homes with our children. And let us embrace it with a believing heart.

That we may do all the words of this law and receive the covenant blessing of Jehovah God.



*The secret things belong
unto the LORD our God:
but those things which are revealed
belong unto us and to our children for ever,
that we may do all the words of this law.*

Deuteronomy 29:29

Marriage, Divorce, and Children (3)

For decades now the worldly psychologists and sociologists have been reassuring society that divorce, rightly done, has no serious, long-term effects on the children of divorce. They repeat this mantra to the present day, although statistics continue to pile up undermining that false claim. Those who are children of divorce themselves, like Kristine Steakley and Elizabeth Marquardt, fully expose the lie.¹ Writes Steakley, "Our actions have consequences, and one of the consequences of divorce is the battered hearts of children whose homes are broken when marriage vows are abandoned" (10).

The focus of this editorial is the church's responsibility to the children of divorce—both officially as institute and unofficially as church members. In order to know how the church can and must help children of divorce, we must know something of the spiritual and emotional damage divorce wreaks on children.

Take your seat in the pew next to the child of divorce, and listen with the ears of that child. The reading of the law suddenly takes on a different significance at the fifth commandment—"Honor thy father and thy mother." Listen, with this new perspective, to the sermon on the Heidelberg

Catechism, Q. & A. 104. "What doth God require in the fifth commandment? A. That I show all honor, love, and fidelity, to my father and mother...." Show honor to a father who has most dishonorably deserted his children. Show love to a mother whose love for her children grew cold, and she forsook them. Show all faithfulness to parents who were grossly unfaithful to their wedding vows, and to their calling to be godly parents. Do you begin to understand something of the spiritual struggle for the child of divorce?

Listen now as the Lord's Prayer is expounded, starting with the words, "Our Father." The Bible reveals the analogy between God and earthly fathers (Ps. 103:13: "Like a father pitieth his children, so the LORD..."). For most believers, the word *father* brings up pleasant thoughts, and the minister can profitably use this biblical comparison to develop the truth of God's loving care for His people. However, for the child of divorce, this name evokes not good thoughts, but evil. Kristine Steakley has an entire chapter devoted to this problem ("Getting Past 'Our Father'"). She writes,

Using father language to talk about God is a barrier to faith for many children of divorce. We hear that God is our father, and instinctively we think of words like abandonment, loss and unfaithfulness. Those of us who have seen our fathers leave our family, who have seen our fathers have affairs with other women, who have been the child

afraid that daddy no longer has time for us, can think that a God who is called Father will be the same way. Who is to say that God will stick around, that he will love us always, that he will never forsake us? If he is our father, well, we know what to expect from that kind of relationship, and it is not good (147).

Not infrequently, the church itself wounds children of divorce. The church that is unwilling to preach against the sin of unbiblical divorce, and that tolerates it and the subsequent remarriage, places its approval on these grievous sins against God and the children. How can a child of divorce sit in a church that will not condemn his father's desertion of the family and remarriage to another woman? How can he trust that the word preached is faithful to the Bible when God's word on marriage is so blatantly contradicted?

The wounds of these children are not healed but made worse by church members who do not know how to help. Many members, raised in intact homes, scarcely know how to begin dealing with children of divorce. Steakley describes the experience of many:

Those of us in Generations X and Y who are children of divorce and churchgoers typically found little conversation about our family structure in religious settings. For the most part we were ignored. Occasionally we were ostracized. There was a stigma attached to being a child of divorced parents, and we learned to keep it under wraps (114).

¹ These are the authors of the books *Child of Divorce*, *Child of God*, and, *Between Two Worlds*, respectively.

This pain lingers into adulthood if members of the church view these children as tainted, as unreliable, as more likely to divorce if they marry. This also can reflect on God in the minds of the child. "When Christians let us down, we can feel that God has let us down. The church is the body of Christ. When we feel slapped around or overlooked by the church, we can begin to feel that God has done the slapping and ignoring" (Steakley, 155).

In addition to all of that, writes Steakley, many children of divorce blame *God* for their parents' divorce. She explains:

Surely God could have stopped our parents from getting a divorce. If he is sovereign, isn't the whole thing his fault anyway? If it is his fault somehow, then we are justified in turning our backs on him, in being angry at him and refusing to step foot in his house. God thus becomes our scapegoat (Lev. 16:7-22) (154).

She immediately points out the wrong thinking. "God bears no guilt for our sins. We are wholly responsible for them. He bears no guilt for our parents' divorce. They made their own choices, rightly or wrongly, and any guilt is theirs and theirs alone" (155).

Hope

In the face of these barriers, burdens, and wounds, the church is called to proclaim the Word. The preaching must set forth the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, identify sin as the cause of man's misery, and call all men to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. In that message is hope.

The hope for the children of divorce, as it is for all wounded, struggling believers (which is all believers), is God. There is none else. Who God is and what He is like gives hope. He is hope because as God He *is* love, mercy, justice, compassion, wisdom, and power.

A particularly refreshing aspect of Steakley's book is that she does not hedge on the truth of God's sovereignty. This is where nearly all religious literature fails. God, being (supposedly) only love, could not possibly will that all this evil come upon these children. So He stands helplessly by as the tragedy unfolds. Not so Steakley. She points out the sorrows inflicted upon Job. And in the end of the book of Job, where we would expect God to come out with a logical explanation, He does something very different. She elaborates:

Instead, God shows up and hands Job his celestial resume. His reasoning is that of a parent who says, "Because I said so." God essentially tells Job, "When you are big enough and wise enough to create a magnificent universe and keep it rolling along perfectly for a couple of millennia, then you can begin to question me. Until then, let's remember who is the Creator and who is the created" (94).

She adds this insightful application:

It is not the answer we are looking for, but ultimately it is the only answer we get from a God who is beyond our understanding. And it is the only answer that offers real comfort. How can it be comforting? Because we know that, indeed, our God made everything that exists; he is sovereign over all of creation, including us, and not one tiny thing that happens escapes his notice or thwarts his plans. The horrible things that sometimes happen in the secrecy of our families, in homes where we should have been safe, have not been secret from God, nor will they remain secret. Paul says that God will one day judge us and "bring to light what is hidden in darkness" (I Cor. 4:5).

God is the hope for the children of divorce because this sov-

ereign God has a plan both for the universe and for each life. Since He is perfectly wise, His plan has no flaws. Although His plan is rarely our plan, His is higher and infinitely better (Is. 55:8-9). And because God is sovereign, He is able to make all things work together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28).

This great God is also perfectly holy. He condemns sin and holds every man, woman, and child responsible for his or her sins. The most heinous act ever committed by man, the murder of the Son, occurred by the sovereign determination of God; yet the men who performed it with their "wicked hands" are guilty (Acts 2:23). This is what the church must preach, confirming the word with Christian discipline.

But the church must also preach that God is a compassionate Father to His children. Difficult though it may be, children of divorce must come to understand and love the fatherhood of God. The church must carefully teach that God has created the position of father in the race of men in order to be able to point to His care of His children. Yet God is the true Father. Earthly fathers are but dim reflections of the true Father. They also fail—every one of them. But God, our Father, never, ever forsakes, abandons, or ceases loving His children.

The clearest manifestation of God's love and mercy is Jesus Christ. He is the high priest who understands our every suffering. He is the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He experiences the load of guilt for sins He did not commit. (A child of divorce very often blames himself for his parents' divorce.) The Lord understands rejection—having been rejected at every turn, from Bethlehem to Nazareth, from His brothers to His disciples. In the end, His own Father rejected Him, push-

ing His Son away into the dark abyss of eternal wrath. Knowing all this suffering from experience, this merciful Jesus runs to our cry in our troubles and temptations (Heb. 2:18).

Church members must reflect the same loving concern for children of divorce that God has shown to us. These children have special needs and burdens. We must talk with them about their special situation, their struggles, and their heartaches. We must not heal the wounds lightly, saying "Peace, peace; it will get better; you will get over it." But we must lead them, walk with them, guide them to God. Steakley writes,

God knows our sorrow intimately because he made us and knows everything about us.... He promises to heal our broken hearts and be with us in the process. He prays for us when we are too worn out with grief to form words. He gives comfort to our souls through his Holy Spirit (31).


Be warned, people of God!

We will not be able to help these wounded saints if we consider them inferior, perhaps even "risky." Are children of divorce more susceptible to divorce? Unbelievers may well be, but believing children of divorce are more committed to a lifelong marriage than most believers. They know the dangers. They know the devastating effects of a bad marriage and of divorce on children. For those reasons, they usually work harder at a good marriage than those who grew up in an intact home.

God demands much of His church. The church must boldly proclaim the unbreakable bond of marriage. The Protestant Reformed Churches, and all churches that maintain that God unites one man and one woman for life, have no reason for embarrassment! On the contrary! And do notice that rejecting *remarriage* after divorce for either party is in harmony with the godly concern for the children. What could be better for the children than that the husband and wife reconcile

in the way of godly repentance? Dad and Mom back together? One home? One family again? That is the heartfelt desire, the secret hope of the children. But that hope is dashed when one or both parents remarry. The door to reconciliation is closed.

Again I say, preach these truths clearly and boldly. Teach them in catechism, home, and school. Demand holiness of life in the members. And members, exhort each other to faithfulness in your marriages.

The ultimate cause is the glory of God in the beautiful picture of His covenant manifest in the marriage union. But God's purpose for marriage is also the godly seed of the covenant. He continues His covenant in the generations. For these children, therefore, strive mightily for strong marriages. God will bless such efforts. Spiritual blessings will flow richly from a husband and wife united in biblical instruction and discipline, and a godly example. May God keep His people faithful in this most significant of relationships. 

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass

Prof. David Engelsma

Chapter 3

The Millennium (2)

Reformed Amillennialism

As I wrote in the previous article, "Reformed dogmatics must establish the right doctrine of the millennium, and expose the errors of

both forms of millennialism, at the very outset of its treatment of cosmic eschatology." Also, "the eschatological topic of the millennium concerns the thousand-year period of Revelation 20. The truth of the millennium is established by sound interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10."

Generally, Revelation 20:1-10 is a symbolical, or figurative, description of the entire age of the new covenant from Christ's exal-

tation at the right hand of God in the Ascension until shortly before His second coming.

Revelation 20 is a vision. John begins the chapter, "I saw." The vision certainly teaches certain important events belonging to the things that must shortly come to pass as Christ returns quickly, but in the manner of a vision. The manner of teaching of a vision differs from that of a historical account. No interpreter

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of Revelation 20 is able to explain the passage “literally,” regardless of his insistence or boast. Satan is not “literally” an aged snake, nor can he, being a spirit, “literally” be bound with a key and a large chain.

This vision reveals especially two truths about the last days that began with the exaltation of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. One is the life and glory of the faithful believers in heaven in the “intermediate state.” The other truth is the binding of Satan.

The main specific teachings of this passage include the following.

First, in perfect keeping with the symbolic, or figurative, nature of apocalyptic prophecy (prophecy of the second coming of Christ and of the end of the world), in perfect keeping with the symbolical nature of the book of Revelation, and in perfect keeping with the obviously symbolical nature of the twentieth chapter of Revelation, the one thousand years, or millennium, of Revelation 20 is a figurative reference to the entire time of the new covenant, as a fullness, or complete unit of time, from Christ’s exaltation until shortly before His bodily return. One thousand is the number ten to the third power. Ten in Scripture represents the fullness of a thing as determined by God, for example, the fullness of His righteousness in the ten commandments or the fullness of His wrath in the ten plagues upon Egypt.

To the question, “With respect to what is the millennium the fullness?” the answer must be that it is the fullness of the age of the New Testament gospel and of the gathering of the elect church out of all nations. Peter described the age, or period, of the last days that began with the outpouring of the Spirit as the time of the salvation of the New Testament church out of all

nations when he explained the events of Pentecost: “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Paul indicated the fundamental nature of the present age when he called it the day of salvation: “Behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2). That the first seal opened by the Lamb is the running of the white horse with its crowned rider, “conquering and to conquer,” representing the victorious preaching of the gospel in all the world, characterizes the New Testament age as supremely the period of the gospel of Christ and its saving of the elect church (Rev. 6:1, 2). II Peter 3:9 clearly implies the dominating characteristic of the present age by God’s decree when it teaches that the one thing that explains what to us appears as the delay of the return of Christ is the necessity that all of us come to repentance under the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

Revelation 20 itself makes plain of what the one thousand years are the fullness. The souls of those who live and reign with Christ are the martyred and triumphant church in heaven, the great harvest throughout the present age of the preaching of the word of God. And, rightly understood, the binding of Satan has as its purpose that the gospel may run its God-appointed course, something that would be impossible were Satan to deceive the nations prematurely.

Second, the one thousand years begins with the binding of Satan (vv. 1-3). This is the work of the risen Jesus Christ upon His ascension into heaven and sitting at God’s right hand. In His sovereign lordship over all things, as the reward of His obedience in redeeming God’s elect, Christ

bound Satan so that He might carry out the gracious will of the Father, which is also His will, that by the gospel all the church be gathered. The binding of Satan was contemporaneous with the casting of Satan out of heaven as revealed in Revelation 12.

Third, the binding of Satan represents Christ’s sovereign restraint of Satan keeping Satan from deceiving the nations: “that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled” (v. 3). Satan’s deception of the nations will be his uniting of the nations under Antichrist in the worldwide Kingdom of Man. The rising of this kingdom will involve an all-out assault upon the kingdom of Christ, which is the true church. This assault upon the church will be the main purpose of Satan in rearing up his kingdom, for the church is the bride of the hated Jesus Christ and the bearer of His name in the world. Verses 7-10 describe the assault upon the church and its outcome.

Christ’s binding of Satan for a thousand years is related to the restraining of the man of sin foretold in II Thessalonians 2:6, 7 (A.V.: “withholding” and “letting”), so that the “lawless one” (A.V.: “that Wicked”) does not come before the time God has appointed.

The binding of Satan does not indicate inactivity on Satan’s part throughout the present age. It does not mean that he cannot instigate great wickedness in all nations; that he cannot be filling the cup of the world’s iniquity; that he cannot effect the cruel persecution of the early church by the Roman empire and the equally cruel persecution of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and France at the time of the Reforma-

*...the binding of Satan
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tion by states under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church; that he cannot accomplish the apostasy of much of the post-apostolic church into the false church of Rome and the apostasy of much of Protestantism today into the false church; or that he cannot lay the groundwork for the deception of the nations over the course of centuries by education that trains the people to regard the Bible as a merely human book, to dismiss the God of the Christian faith as a superstition, to remake Jesus into a purely this-worldly savior (along with the saviors of all the other great religions), and to view man, the end-product of the evolutionary process, as lord and god.

One thing he cannot do, one thing he must not do, strive as he will. He cannot deceive the nations for a thousand years, for Jesus will gather the church, whom He loves and whom He redeemed with His precious blood, out of the nations.

Fourth, during this present age—the time of the millennium—particularly the martyrs live and reign in heaven with Christ in the intermediate state (vv. 4-6). John saw “souls” sitting on thrones, and these were “the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God” (v. 4).

As I demonstrated at some length earlier in this series, in the intermediate state, immediately upon death, the believer begins to enjoy in his soul the reward of conscious life and glory that will be his perfectly, body and soul, in the eternal state. This is the promise of Revelation 20 to the suffering members of the church in the world, encouraging us to be faithful to Christ even unto death.

The millennial reign of the saints with Christ of Revelation 20, about which both dispensational premillennialists and postmillennialists make so much in the interests of their respective carnal kingdoms of Christ on earth, is *in heaven* as the *intermediate state*. Souls of those who have been beheaded do not reign on earth during present history.

That the reign of the saints with Christ in Revelation 20 refers to the intermediate state has always been the interpretation of Reformed orthodoxy. Francis Turretin has written:

John [says] “they lived” (to wit, a happy and glorious life in heaven, contrary to what the enemies of the church by a foolish judgment supposed, for they thought that those whom they had beheaded, perished miserably; but the beheading was life to them and their extermination

was their reign with Christ). And if it is said, they will reign with Christ, it must not at once be understood that they will reign on the earth, since it

can best be said that they will reign with Christ in heaven.¹

Herman Bavinck also explained the life and reign of the saints with Christ of Revelation 20 as realized in heaven. “The life and rule of the believers who remained faithful in the great tribulation take place in heaven, not on earth. Not a word is said

about the earth.... The thrones he [John] saw (20:4) are located in heaven (4:4; 11:16), and the souls of the martyrs are seen here (20:4), as in every other passage, in heaven (6:9; 7:9, 14-15; 11:12; 14:1-5; 18:20; 19:1-8).... Now, in heaven, this kingship is temporary: it lasts a thousand years.”²

Even B. B. Warfield, ardent postmillennialist though he was, acknowledged that Revelation 20:4-6 describes “the ‘intermediate state’—of the saints of God gathered in heaven away from the confused noise and garments bathed in blood that characterize the war upon earth, in order that they may securely await the end.”³

Although verses 4-6 refer particularly to the martyrs, all genuine Christians are included. All who are faithful to Christ to the end, holding fast and overcoming, in the language of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, live and reign with Christ in heaven in their soul in the intermediate state. In truth, all true disciples of Christ are in a certain sense martyrs. Such is the Christian life of struggle against Satan, against the wicked world of the ungodly, including the apostate churches, and against his own sinful flesh that, as Paul declares in the name of all believers, “for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom. 8:36, quoting Ps. 44:22). Christ forewarned every follower that “he that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 10:39). Losing one’s earthly life

...in the intermediate state, immediately upon death, the believer begins to enjoy in his soul the reward of conscious life and glory that will be his perfectly, body and soul, in the eternal state.

¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, tr. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., vol. 3 (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1997), 580.

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4: *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, tr. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 679.

³ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 649.

in various ways short of physical death for Christ's sake is a form of martyrdom.

The life of the soul of the believer in the intermediate state is the "first resurrection" (v. 5). These souls "lived," we read in verse 4. They lived genuine, full, spiritual life. They lived perfect eternal life. Their living this life immediately upon their death in the body on earth is a real resurrection because it is the act of Christ raising them, through death, into heavenly, sinless life, which even their souls did not perfectly enjoy on the earth. This, I have explained more fully in my earlier treatment of the intermediate state.

If the life of the soul of the believer in heaven is the first resurrection, his second resurrection will be the resurrection of his body. Corresponding are two stages of death for the reprobate unbeliever. His first death is his suffering of the torments of hell in his soul at the moment of his physical death. His second death will be Christ's casting of him into the lake of fire, resurrected body and soul (vv. 14, 15).

Fifth, at the end of the thousand years, Satan will be "loosed a little season" (v. 3). He will

be permitted to succeed in uniting the nations of the world in one grand, but godless, kingdom under the Antichrist. The antichristian nature of these united nations and their attack on the true church of Jesus Christ are described in verses 7-9.


This visionary prophecy of the very end of earthly history as the rearing up of a satanic world-power harmonizes with Paul's teaching in the "little apocalypse" of II Thessalonians 2 that in the future the one who now restrains the man of sin so that he cannot be revealed before his God-appointed time will be taken out of the way. "And then shall that Wicked [literally, the 'Lawless One'] be revealed" (II Thess. 2:8). He will be on the scene, according to II Thessalonians 2, when the Lord returns from heaven, for the Lord will "destroy [him] with the brightness of his coming" (v. 8).

Indeed, the warning of all the New Testament is that this age will conclude with abounding lawlessness, apostasy, and the great tribulation for those who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

This warning, believers and their children living in the world

in the twenty-first century must take to heart. It is not impossible that Satan has already been loosed, finally to achieve his great goal.

In no way does this imply fear on the part of the saints—not in light of Revelation 20. The time of the rampaging enemy of God and us is merely a "little season." Christ's and our kingdom is everlasting. When Satan and his terrorizing troopers have done their worst, they send us on our way to thrones in heaven where we live and reign with Christ (and being "with Christ" is better than the thrones). Besides all this, the doom of Satan, his kingdom, and his assault upon the church is sure. It has been written down on the pages of the word of God, which cannot err. "Fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (vv. 9, 10).

The victorious Jesus Christ will sit upon the throne of judgment, before whom the nations will appear to give account (vv. 11ff.). 

Strength of Youth

Rev. Garry Eriks

The Practice of Godliness

There is nothing better for the Christian young person than to be known for godliness. He may be an "A" student, an obedient son at home, a good brother who does not fight with his siblings, and a conscien-

tious catechism student, but none of this matters if he is not godly. Godliness is not simply obedience, but it is a life focused on serving God.

In the Scriptures many of God's people were famous for their godliness already as teenagers. David was known as "a man after his [the Lord's] own heart" (I Sam. 13:14). This characterized

David as a young boy (maybe as young as 13 or 14) when he battled against the giant Goliath trusting in Jehovah for the victory. Daniel and his three friends were taken captive into Babylon in their early teen years. They were godly young men. When the king's delicious food was set before them, Daniel and his friends refused to eat. And Daniel's prayers to God

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were so regular that you could set your watch by them. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was probably still a teenager when she gave birth to Jesus, our Savior. As a teenager she believed the promises of God and walked in His ways. She was godly. These young people were known for practicing godliness, as a fruit of God's grace. Are you?

Godliness

The Scriptures call you to live this godliness, as those saved by grace. Titus 2:11, 12 says, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." God calls you to practice godliness in I Timothy 4:7, 8, "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

What is this godliness? *Godliness is a devotion to God that results in a life of obedience. It is living a life devoted to God.*

Those who are godly live in such a way that their knowledge of God and their relationship to Him determine their conduct in all things. It is life according to truth.

The godly young person is truly devoted to God. The heart of this devotion is the fear of God. This is the very idea of the word "godliness," which means "to revere well." The only One whom we revere and honor is God, because He is infinitely exalted over all, as the God of all glory. The fear of God is

not a dread fear in which we are afraid that God will punish us for our sin. Fearing God is a reverence and awe for the majesty, holiness, and transcendence of God. In all of heaven and earth, God is the One who is truly awesome.

Do you have this awe and reverence for God? When you leave church on Sunday or leave the catechism class Monday night (or whenever you have it), do you confess, "What a great God we serve!" Where you have lost this awe and reverence for God it is urgent that you recover it in your hearts and minds.

We live in an age that does not revere God. There is no fear of God in the wicked world. The world profanes and blasphemes the name of God in the TV programs, the movies, music, and its language. Many in the broader church world have no use for theology and clear biblical teaching. But theology and clear biblical teaching in the preaching and in catechism are so vital because the

word teaches how high and great God is. The instruction you receive in catechism about the greatness of God's perfections and

love is of great importance for your lives. The higher your view of God is, the deeper will be your reverence for Him. True godliness is living with this song of praise in your heart, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3).

Not only is the God-fearing Christian filled with an awe of God, but also he appreciates God's amazing, unfailing love. The godly are gripped by God's love. To understand God's love,

look to the cross. God sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins. The godly never forget how undeserving they are of God's love. They know that they have earned only His holy and just wrath. They know they are the chief of sinners. But Jesus came into the world to save such sinners. Jesus died on the cross of Calvary to reconcile us to a holy God from whom we are alienated by our sin.

Knowing God's love in Jesus Christ is connected to devotion to God in this way: the two grow together. The more we understand God's love for us in Jesus Christ, the more we will be amazed at the greatness and majesty of God. God has saved me from my sins! Amazing!

Being gripped by God's love does not lead to carelessness in life, but stimulates to a greater devotion to God in life. This is why you need instruction in the preaching and in the catechism classes concerning the truth of God's love in Jesus Christ. When this truth touches your hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit, it stimulates to godly living.

Godly living looks like this: the knowledge of God's majesty and love in our hearts results in a thirst for God that is expressed in godly, obedient living. Where there is godliness, there is a longing for God Himself. David confesses in Psalm 63:1, 2, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." This is what lives in the heart of the godly. As the godly man contemplates the awesomeness of God's holiness, glory, and majesty, and ponders the riches of God's grace and love in Jesus Christ, his heart is captivated by God. He is satisfied with God and seeks Him. There

Those who are godly live in such a way that their knowledge of God and their relationship to Him determine their conduct in all things.

is a longing for God and a love for Him. This characterized the life of those godly young people saved by grace—David, Daniel, and Mary.

This desire for God becomes the dominating principle of life. Reverence for God shines through in every part of life. Godliness is living in such a way that God's name is honored and glorified. The godly do not want to disobey the Word of God. They desire a life devoted to God in obedience to His commandments.

When you examine your heart and life, do you see this godliness? Are you godly in relationship to your parents? Would godliness characterize your life with your friends? Does godliness describe your language, what you look at on the computer, the music you listen to, and what you do for fun?

The Practice

I Timothy 4:7 commands us, "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness." The idea is that growth in godliness occurs only through intense training and practice. The word "exercise" is an athletic term that refers to the intense training of an athlete in preparation for an athletic contest. There is no instant athlete. If you are involved in sports or any other competition, you know this. A young man does not pick up a basketball for the first time and dribble the ball through his legs up and down the court and make three-pointer after three-pointer. A young woman does not pick up a softball bat for the first time and hit homerun after homerun in a softball game. The athlete must train and practice, putting in time, sweat, and conditioning to get better at his sport. Muscles must be toned and skills repeated so that the body is able to react without thinking.

So also there is no instant growth and development in godliness. Growth in godliness comes through practice and exercise. This does not mean salvation is a matter of our own works

Growth in godliness comes through practice and exercise.

and efforts. From beginning to end salvation is the sovereign work of God. Although this is true, the idea is that one does not become godly overnight. This is not the way in which God works.

The Word of God commands you to train yourself in godliness. Pursue godliness in dependence on God's grace. What an important command. We can be so disciplined in certain areas of our lives, but lazy when it comes to the practice of godliness. Some of you spend hours a week practicing for a particular sport, practicing a musical instrument, and doing your homework so that you will get good grades. These are not bad things. When Paul says to Timothy, "bodily exercise profiteth little," he is not knocking athletics. He is not saying exercise is completely unprofitable. He is making the point that just as athletes put in the time, the sweat, and the practice to improve their athletic ability, so also we must put in the practice to grow in godliness. Michael Phelps and Tiger Woods and Lebron James devote their lives to improving their athletic skills so they can achieve greatness in their sports. You must devote yourselves to godliness with an even greater devotion because there is no growth in godliness without practice. There is no shortcut to growth in godliness. We would like it if once in a while we could simply pray, "Father, make me godly," and then wait for God to infuse us directly with godliness. But this is not the way God works. Godliness grows

in our lives in the way of training and exercise.

What belongs to this practice? First, the right leader or coach makes all the difference. This is true in athletics. The right coach has the ability to make mediocre players or a mediocre team great with strategy, training, and practice.

Young people, you have the right leader. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus motivates to live in godliness. He guides in godliness by His word. Jesus uses others to help you in the practice of godliness. Parents, grandparents, teachers, ministers, elders, and other adults in the church are those who guide and encourage you to godliness. God has placed parents over you for your growth in godliness. Their desire and calling is to teach godliness with words and by example. Do not expect godliness in your lives if you are surrounded by ungodly people. In this regard, godly friends are important. If your friends are not an encouragement to you in godliness, or you are not an encouragement to your friends in godliness, those friendships are not pleasing to God.

Secondly, the study of God's Word is vital for growth in godliness. Exercise in godliness happens with the careful study of God's Word. This is the idea found in II Timothy 3:16, 17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Word of God instructs in doctrine and teaches about the living God. The Word also corrects sin and teaches the way of righteousness. The fruit in the child of God is a life of good works. Growth in doctrine produces growth in godliness. So read and study the Word of God. When you study God's Word, ask yourself this

question first, "What has God revealed about His glory and majesty and love in this passage?" Then apply this doctrine to your life.

Third, practice godliness in your lives. This begins by denying yourself the things of this world that oppose godliness. Do not expect a life of godliness if you are absorbing ungodliness by watching the TV programs and the movies of this world. Do not expect a life of godliness if you are absorbing the man-glorifying thoughts of the music of this world. Instead, practicing godliness means taking God's Word and applying it to all of life.

Consider in your life how to exercise your devotion to God and practice this. Practice this


in relationship to your parents. If your relationship with your parents has been confrontational because of your rebellious heart, practice the godly virtues of submission and obedience. If you have a brother or sister with whom you fight, practice humility and love. Be a peacemaker. If you and your friends are watching, listening to, and doing things that encourage ungodliness, be the one to encourage the others to stop and to practice godliness.

This is not easy. In fact it is impossible to do this on your own. Pray for God's grace daily to live godly.

The Profit

There is a blessed end for the practice of godliness just as

there is an end for the practice in athletics. After hard practice and faithful preparation, there is the achievement of a "W" in athletics. The prize is sweet after hours of self-discipline and practice. There is no guarantee of victory in athletics, because no matter how much time you put in the other team may be better.

In the practice of godliness, there is a certain end. The exercise of godliness is not in vain. The end is everlasting life with God. We do not earn this life. It is ours for Jesus' sake. For this prize we reach. This is what Paul says in Philippians 3:13, 14: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." 

...the study of God's Word is vital for growth in godliness.

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Congregation's Calling to Support the Ministry of the Gospel (2)

Digressing from our examination of the office of deacon, we are examining the congregation's obligation to support the gospel ministry. That this is her obligation, and the obligation of every mature individual and of every head of household in the church, we

have asserted in our last article. In conclusion we noted that our support of the gospel ministry, just like our support of the diaconate, must be carried out with sincerity and simplicity of heart, willingly and cheerfully, trusting God to supply our needs.

The question before us now is whether each church member is obligated to support the work of the ministry *equally*, viewing the "per family/individual" rate of the budget as an obligation laid on each member, which obligation must be met; or whether we

may give to the support of the gospel ministry (commonly done in the PRC by giving to the General and Building Funds) as God has prospered us (I Cor. 16:2) and according as we purpose in our heart (II Cor. 9:7).

I will argue the former view. Admittedly, I cannot bring forth any particular Bible verse that says "thou shalt" on this point. To make my case, I will appeal to Bible history, and to the practice of God's covenant people in the Old Testament.

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The Old Testament church's support of the gospel ministry.

Supporting the gospel ministry as it was carried out in the tabernacle and temple, the Israelites were to bring offerings for various causes. One cause was the support of the priests and Levites, who devoted a significant part of their life, if not all of their life, to the work of the temple (Num. 18; Deut. 14:27-29, 18:1-8, 26:1ff.; Neh. 10:32-39). Another cause was the supply of materials for the sacrifices themselves—animals, wood, grain, oil, wine, and such like (Neh. 10:32-39). A third cause was the erecting and maintaining of the facilities for worship—the tabernacle, and later the temple (Ex. 35, I Chron. 29).

By three kinds of giving, the Old Testament church supported this ministry of the gospel: by freewill offerings, by tithes, and by fees that were assessed equally to all.

Freewill offerings

The freewill, voluntary offerings were not the primary source of support of the gospel ministry. These offerings were brought for two purposes. First, by freewill offerings the materials for the building of the tabernacle and temple were obtained (Ex. 35:20-29; I Chron. 29:1-9). Israel had no banks to turn to for loans; she did not build her buildings on credit; she supplied all the resources for them up front.

Second, some of the offerings that the Jews were to bring to the temple were commanded; others consisted of freewill offerings. The individual Jew brought certain burnt offerings, peace offerings, or thank offerings voluntarily, to thank and praise God for some mercy shown to him personally, such as recovery from sickness.

At this point we note that while Israel did bring freewill offerings to the tabernacle and

temple, the support of the ministry of the gospel did not depend on these offerings. Rather, it depended on the tithes and the assessed fees.

Tithes

Israel was commanded to bring tithes of the seed of the land (reaped corn and grain and vegetables), of the fruit of the tree, and of the herd and flock (Lev. 27:30-32). Specifically, the tithes were intended for the support of the Levites and priests, but also for the work of the temple (Num. 18:26ff.).

This requirement of the ceremonial law remained in force until Jesus abolished it by His death. So God's faithful people brought these tithes throughout the Old Testament, especially in times of reformation under Hezekiah (II Chron. 31) and Nehemiah (Neh. 10:37f.). When the people did not bring their tithes, the prophets rebuked them for this (Mal. 3:8-10).

Assessed fees

The freewill offerings were voluntary, and the tithes were commanded of God. By contrast, the assessment of a specific fee was commanded in one instance, and after that was a custom that Israel imposed upon herself.

Of the one instance in which God commanded this we read in Exodus 30:11-16. When the Israelites were numbered, every male twenty years old and older was to pay a half shekel as an offering to the Lord. God specifically stated that "the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel" (v. 15). This fee was to be used "for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (v. 16). Because God commanded this fee to be paid on a specific occasion and for a specific purpose (gratitude for redemption from Egypt), and did not indicate that this fee must be paid repeatedly, we do not

consider this command to have been binding on the Israelites in later years.¹

Later Jews did follow this precedent voluntarily. Needing to raise funds to rebuild the temple and support the temple ministry, the returned captives "made ordinances...to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God" (Neh. 10:32). The words "ordinances...to charge ourselves" indicate that they considered this to be a debt that each owed equally. As the following verses indicate, this third part of a shekel was to be brought annually, in addition to the tithes. That they brought a third part of a shekel, rather than half, proves that they did not consider God's command in Exodus 30:11ff. to be binding on them.

Once more we read of this assessed fee, in Matthew 17:24-27. While not clear at first glance, this passage is referring to the "temple tax." The Greek word twice translated "tribute" in verse 24 does not actually mean tribute, or tax, but refers to a specific coin, the value of which was a half shekel. And Jesus' words to Peter make sense only when we understand this to be the tax of which the passage speaks. The men entrusted with collecting the temple tax asked Peter if his master paid the tax, and Peter said that Jesus did. Later Jesus told Peter why, as the Son of God, He did not need to pay that tax—its purpose was to maintain His Father's house! No earthly king taxes his own children for the upkeep of the king's palace! However, Jesus paid the tax so as

¹ · This is the position also of Alfred Edersheim, as set forth in his book *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were At the Time of Christ*. The section in chapter 3 that deals with the temple revenues is interesting reading, recommended to any who desire to know more about this subject.

not to give the Jews occasion to think He was sinning.

This latter passage indicates that in Jesus' day the temple tax was still paid annually. In fact, it seems that by this time it was something of an "unwritten rule" that everyone had to pay this tax. And it is certainly significant and instructive to us that Jesus Himself willingly paid it.

Applying this history to our own practice.

We may apply this history of how the Old Testament church supported the gospel ministry to our own support of the same.

Let none dismiss this history and the lessons it teaches by raising the argument that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament are fulfilled. For first, even if this support were exclusively a matter of the ceremonial law, "we use the testimonies taken out of the law and the prophets to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, and to regulate our life in all honesty to the glory of God, according to His will" (Belgic Confession, Article 25). But second, we have seen that the manner of supporting the gospel ministry was not *entirely* regulated by law in the Old Testament. The law required the bringing of tithes and other offerings; but the one time that God commanded Israel to bring a half-shekel, He did not bind that law on Israel annually. Yet the Israelites voluntarily applied the principle of that law to their own situation, for centuries afterward. So may we. In fact, so do we.

Notice, then, what already has been made obvious: the causes for which Israel brought her commanded tithes and her self-imposed half-shekels are the same causes that we support in giving to the General and Building Funds—the support of those who devote their lives to the ministry of the gospel, the supply of all things necessary to worship

and function as a congregation, and the erection and maintenance of the building in which to worship.

To learn from these passages nothing more than that the church must support the gospel ministry is to take good, but superficial, instruction from them.

These passages also teach by what means the church may support that ministry. She may raise her necessary funds, if she wishes, by relying entirely on freewill offerings. The church that does not have a budget system is not in violation of any command of God's law. But the church may also assess her members a fee, which each must bring equally. The church that uses a per family or per individual budget system is also not in violation of any command of God's law, but is following the precedent set by the church in the Old Testament.

In fact, do not Protestant Reformed Churches generally use a combination of these two means, just as the Israelites brought tithes, half-shekels, and freewill offerings? In most of our churches, the money for the General and Building Funds are raised by assessing each family or each member an equal amount.

But we also take freewill offerings for the piano fund, or organ fund, or work of evangelism, or other causes that relate directly to our worship and work as congregation. And we take freewill offerings for denominational causes that could be supported in their entirety by synodical assessments, but are not—such as the work of domestic and foreign missions, the support of emeriti ministers, and

the support of seminary students. Each member of the congregation must bring a certain amount equally, and then we all have the opportunity to give more, voluntarily, as we have been prospered, by giving to these special collections.

I come, then, to the heart of my argument. It does not regard the freewill offerings, but the offerings for the General and Building Funds, for which we have budgets.

As I said earlier, one finds in Scripture no "thou shalt" that tells every child of God to pay exactly his fair share of the portion of his church's budget.

But the members of the church voluntarily impose such a law on themselves! Particularly when the council of a church proposes a budget that includes a certain amount that must be raised per family or per individual to cover anticipated expenses, and when the male confessing members of that congregation have adopted that budget by majority vote, they

have imposed on each member of their congregation the obligation to pay their fair share. The *council* did not impose this; the law did not get laid down from above. Rather, by adopting the

proposed budget, the *members* of the congregation imposed it on *themselves*. Having imposed such a law on himself, a man of integrity will keep it.

Answering objections.

To my position, Christian brothers and fellow saints have raised objections.

One whole category of objections attempts to bring what I

Each member of the congregation must bring a certain amount equally, and then we all have the opportunity to give more, voluntarily, as we have been prospered, by giving to these special collections.

have said into conflict with other Scripture passages. One objection is that God permits us to give as He has prospered us (I Cor. 16:2). Another is that we are to give cheerfully, not “of necessity” — so that no rule should be made, even by the congregation itself, that binds any of us in our giving (II Cor. 9:7). A third is that we are not to do our alms before men, but are to give them in secret (Matt. 6:1-4)—implying, then, that none should know how much we are giving.

I have not imagined these objections on my own; rather, I have heard these objections in the past.

In response to this category of objections, I repeat that in our churches, our members often have the opportunity to contribute to these causes as they have been prospered, by giving to the freewill offerings.

The fundamental answer to this category of objections, however, is that each of the passages

to which they appeal refers specifically to the care of the poor, not to the support of the gospel ministry. Alms—gifts for the poor—are to be given secretly (Matt. 6:1-4). They are not to be given of necessity (II Cor. 9:7); at no point should we set a budgeted amount for the members of the congregation to give for that purpose. And they are to be given as we are prospered, each deciding for himself how much to give.


But these passages are beside the point, when it comes to the General and Building Funds. For in giving to them, we support a cause from which we all benefit, and which we are showing is dear to our hearts—the ministry of the gospel of grace in Christ.

A second kind of objection regards the fact that some are either unable to pay the amount that the congregation imposes on them, or at least find it very difficult.

I understand that for some, the difficulty is real.

Jesus gave instruction regarding our priorities and actions in such circumstances: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Also to the point is the example of the widow, who cast in her whole living, trusting God to supply her needs (Mark 12:41ff., Luke 21:1ff.).

If paying one’s secular taxes and church budgets and tuition bills are high on one’s list of priorities, these debts will get paid. And then, perhaps by means of our asking the deacons to give us alms so that we can have food and raiment, God will see that our other needs are supplied.

Let us view our General Fund and Building Fund obligations as a debt that we owe to God! And let us pay it, considering the paying of this debt to be a privilege, and a light thing in comparison with the grace of salvation that God has given us! 

Special Article

Rev. Angus Stewart

Rome and Politics (7):

Rome’s Ecumenical Methods with Protestants

Having considered Rome’s false ecumenism with Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and Protestantism, as well as the principles of Roman ecumenism, it remains to examine the methods of its ecumenism. For this, the prime source is, once again, the *Decree of Ecumenism* (1964), produced by Rome’s last

“ecumenical” council, Vatican II (1962-1965).¹ Some examples shall also be given of the use of these methods (or weapons) in the slaughter of careless, apostatizing Protestants. Remember too that Rome’s labors to bring all of Christendom—indeed those of all religions—under its sway

also serve its geopolitical goal to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth with its headquarters in the Vatican.

Change of Names

To those aware of Rome’s persecuting past, the most striking of the various “helps, pathways and methods” (p. 342) of Rome’s ecumenism is the new terminology used for Protestants. Dropping all references to “heretics” or “dogs” and ignoring the dozens of anathemas hurled by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), *Unitatis Red-*

¹ This decree (Latin: *Unitatis Redintegratio*, “Restoration of Unity”) is found in Walter M. Abbot (gen. ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (USA: The America Press, 1966). Henceforward, pages in parentheses refer to this book.

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Previous article in this series: February 1, 2009, p. 206.

integratio refers to Protestants as our “brothers” or “brethren” (pp. 345, 346, 354) or, more frequently, our “separated brethren” (e.g., pp. 342, 346, 347, 348, 349, 351, 352, 353, 354, 365).¹ This change in nomenclature is an important step in Rome’s *aggiornamento* (Italian for “updating”) and has been eagerly received by liberal Protestants. However, Robert Zins’ warning is appropriate:

This new terminology [of “separated brethren”] is a change, but for the Christian, it is also dreadful and dangerous. It appears that Rome wants to label Christians as brothers in hopes of lending credibility to Romanism. It also appears that Rome wishes to hide or minimize the eternal chasm which separates Rome from the gospel of Christ! Christians need to reject such manipulative language and stick to their faith that Christianity and Romanism are absolutely contradictory.... For Rome to call Christians separated brethren is similar to Mormons or Hindus calling Christians separated brethren. We say, “No thank you!”²

Even Martin Luther has been reevaluated by the modern Roman Church. He is no longer a “wild boar” ravaging the Lord’s “vineyard” (as in Leo X’s famous, 1520 bull *Exsurge Domine*); he is a “prophet of the [Roman] Catholic Church” with many fine things to say. His breaking with Rome was a “tragedy.”

Change of Style

Whereas those who broke with the papacy used to be viewed and treated by Rome

with contempt and mistrust, now the “[Roman] Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers” (p. 345). The order of the day is “mutual respect” (p. 359) and “mutual esteem” (p. 362). According to the *Decree of Ecumenism*, “every effort [must be made] to eliminate words, judgments, and actions which do not respond to the condition of separated brethren with truth and fairness and so make mutual relations between them more difficult” (p. 347).³ In Rome’s ecumenical endeavors, it realizes that if it wants to have friends, it must show itself friendly (Prov. 18:24). This ploy was enough for Ahab to deceive naïve Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 18:1-3). The affability of a priest was a large factor in a formerly Reformed friend of mine “re-evaluating” the mass.

With this *Unitatis Redintegratio* “facelift,” not only has the old style of dealing with Protestants changed, but even Reformed language has been misappropriated, further to wrong-foot the unwary. Now Rome talks about undertaking “with vigor the task...of reform” (p. 347) and even the need for “continual reformation” (p. 350)!⁴ Yet Rome’s historic doctrine is that she is unreformable, *semper eadem* (always the same), whereas the Reformed position is *semper reformada* (always reforming).

Moreover, the *Decree of Ecumenism* makes a confession of sin (of sorts): “at times, men of both

sides were to blame” (p. 345) and “in humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us” (p. 351). However, “both sides” are said to have sinned and the specific sins, such as Rome’s heretical doctrines and persecution of Christ’s church, are not mentioned. Importantly, it is only “men of both sides” who have trespassed and not the Roman Church itself.

These are all changes in style and tone, but not in substance, for there is no reformation of Rome’s doctrines, sacraments, discipline, government, or worship. But in our age of tolerance, “niceness” is seen as of great value, while biblical truth is little esteemed.

...in our age of tolerance, “niceness” is seen as of great value, while biblical truth is little esteemed.

Common Activities

In keeping with Rome’s reevaluation of, and new approach to, (liberal) Protestantism, comes a spirit of cooperation (within limits). *Unitatis Redintegratio* recommends “common prayer, where this is permitted” by the Roman hierarchy (pp. 347, 352) and even “common worship” (p. 352), though only “after due regard has been given to all the circumstances of time, place, and personage” and with Roman episcopal authority (pp. 352-353).

Vatican II appreciates the opportunity that “missionary work, in the same territories as other Christians” provides for its false ecumenism (pp. 353-354). Many are the Protestant missionaries who have been seduced by Rome’s wiles while laboring in far-off lands: “Should we not cooperate with Roman Catholics in order to face the common enemy of pagan religion?” This was also the ploy that fooled Jehoshaphat

¹ “The Good Pope,” John XXIII (1958-1963), is especially noted for referring to non-Catholics as “our separated brethren.”

² Robert Zins, *Romanism: The Relentless Roman Catholic Assault on the Gospel of Jesus Christ!* (USA: White Horse Publications, 1994), pp. 198-199.

³ This message is not being heeded, e.g., in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, where Evangelicals are being persecuted by Roman Catholics.

⁴ In his “A Response,” Protestant ecumenist Samuel McCrea Cavert foolishly sees this as “especially gratifying” (p. 368).

and saw the true church (Judah) teaming up with the false church (Israel) to fight against the pagans (Syria) in II Chronicles 18.

The *Decree of Ecumenism* puts a lot of hope in “cooperation in social matters” (p. 354) for the “common good” (p. 347), a key concept in Rome’s social teaching. The decree advises to “start” with “discussions concerning the application of the gospel to moral questions” (p. 365). “Social cooperation” between Roman Catholics and Protestants will show “how the road to the unity of Christians may be made smooth” (p. 355)—a “unity” under the pope’s “Petrine office” (pp. 344, 346)!

Here one thinks of the co-belligerency of evangelicals and Romanists in the culture wars with secular humanists in the political realm over, for example, abortion, euthanasia, and sodomy.¹ It was out of this milieu, and with these concerns, that Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) was spawned. Amongst the prominent evangelical signers of both ECT I, “The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” (29 March, 1994),² and ECT II, “The Gift of Salvation” (12 November, 1997), are Chuck Colson, Bill Bright, Os Guinness, Richard Mouw, Mark Noll, and J. I. Packer.

Dialogue

Underlying all of these activities, and looming large in *Unitatis Redintegratio* (e.g., pp. 347, 353,

358, 361, 362, 363, 364), as well as in all Roman Catholic ecumenical directives and dealings, is dialogue. This deserves highlighting. Twenty-first century Roman-

ism does not use interdicts or the stake against the recalcitrant. Nor are preaching or debates its favored methods. Worldly-wise Rome

copies the means most favored for conflict resolution in the modern political realm: dialogue.

The *Decree of Ecumenism* recommends that Roman Catholics take the initiative, “making the first approaches” towards their “separated brethren” (p. 348). Present at Vatican II were some eighty observers invited from Eastern Orthodox and “mainline” Protestant churches. Included were “Mr. Pentecost,” David du Plessis (1905-1987), one of the leading founders of the charismatic movement, and neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). Protestant ecumenist Samuel McCrea Cavert enthuses that Paul VI joined with “Protestant and [Eastern] Orthodox participants in a service for prayer for unity in Rome during the last week of the Council” (p. 368). The Roman laity and clergy who have followed the instruction and example of Vatican II have discovered that many Protestants are so ignorant of the gospel and of Roman Catholicism that their advances have been welcomed.

Unitatis Redintegratio emphasizes not only the role of grassroots Roman Catholics and the priests (pp. 348, 349-350) but also that of Rome’s bishops and theologians in dialogue. The priests and these “heavier guns” must especially be trained in “theological and historical studies” (p. 350) and “other branches of

knowledge” (p. 353). This includes “study” in the “distinctive doctrines” of various Protestant churches, “as well as of their own history, spiritual and liturgical life, their religious psychology and cultural background,” so that the Roman apologist is “truly competent” and can engage in theological “dialogue” with those of a particular Protestant tradition on “an equal footing” (p. 353).

Dr. Eduardo J. Echeverria is the sort of man envisaged by Vatican II’s *Decree of Ecumenism*. He gained his PhD in philosophy from Abraham Kuyper’s Free University, Amsterdam, and is well read in the thought of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), Professor of Theology at that institution. Invited by John Bolt, Echeverria spoke on “The God of Philosophy and of the Holy Scripture: Herman Bavinck and John Paul II” as part of the conference, “A Pearl and a Leaven: Herman Bavinck for the Twenty-First Century,” at Calvin Theological Seminary (18-20 September, 2008).

The way of Rome’s ecumenical dialogue is carefully stated. There may be “variety” “in the theological elaborations of revealed truth” (p. 349) and “terminology” should be used which is easily understood by the “separated brethren” (p. 354). The “formulation” may be modified, but Rome’s dogmas must be preserved (p. 350). Moreover, it is “highly important” that the clergy present Rome’s theology, especially as it concerns said “separated brethren,” sensitively and “not polemically” (p. 353). One wonders what that bellicose, papal controversialist Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) would have made of this!

The “prudent ecumenical action” (p. 357) advocated by the *Decree of Ecumenism* is to be characterized by “prudence,” “patience” and “vigilance” (p. 348). It is to be under the “skilful promotion and prudent guid-

Worldly-wise Rome copies the means most favored for conflict resolution in the modern political realm: dialogue.

¹ Co-belligerency with Roman Catholics against humanists proceeds on the fallacy that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

² Cf. Kevin Reed, *Making Shipwreck of the Faith: Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together* (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995).

ance" of "bishops everywhere in the world" (p. 350), so that "all the Catholic faithful...participate skillfully in the work of ecumenism" (p. 347) and all the clergy have "mastered" their ecumenically sensitive theology (p. 353). Clearly, Rome reckons that "prudence" is the key to its ecumenical dialogue continuing with greater speed and success.

Rome's Progress

Despite setbacks, Rome is making progress in its false ecumenism through dialogue on every continent with leaders and members of Christian bodies (at varying speeds): Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Waldensian, Pentecostal and Charismatic, as well with as cultists and others. Key to this is the establishment of common ground. For example, with Pentecostals and Charismatics, Rome's commitment to ongoing revelation, miracles, and mystical experiences is stressed.

This is not to deny that there are some Roman Catholics who take the more traditional approach to converting Protestants.


Two examples are Scott Hahn, a former minister in the Presbyterian Church in America who wrote (with his wife) *Rome Sweet Home* (1993), and Robert Sungenis, author of *Not by Faith Alone* (1997), attacking *sola fide* (faith alone); *Not by Scripture Alone* (1997), attacking *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone); and *Not by Bread Alone* (2000), advocating the mass.¹ In our day, Rome's polemics have slain their thousands, but its false ecumenism has slain its tens of thousands.

Rome sees all this as one of "the signs of the times" (p. 347). In this it is right, but not in the way it thinks. Rome's false ecumenism is not included in the spread of the gospel (Matt. 24:14); it is part of the rearing up of the abomination of desolation (v. 15). Apostasy features prominently in the signs of the times (e.g., vv. 4-5, 11-12, 24). Increasing unity between (liberal) Protestants and Rome is not the fruit

¹ Sungenis is a geocentrist, who has persistently been charged with anti-Semitism, one element in his conflict with his bishop.

of God's grace but the mark of His judgment. God sends "strong delusion" upon those who receive "not the love of the truth" so "that they should believe a lie" (II Thess. 2:10-11), including the lie that is the Church of Rome.

Rome has high expectations that more and more Protestants will come under its sway: "it is our hope that the ecumenical spirit and mutual esteem will gradually increase among all men" (p. 362) and "we confidently look to the future" (p. 365). Moreover, Rome anticipates not only further progress in its false ecumenism but also success from its interfaith dialogue with pagan religions, thus further strengthening its hand as a geopolitical power.

Increasing Roman Catholic membership would bring with it greater representation and influence in national and inter-governmental bodies (e.g., US, G8, EU, UN). The kingdom of man (Dan. 2), which is the kingdom of the beast (ch. 7), is drawing nearer. The good news is that Christ will destroy it and give the everlasting kingdom to the saints (vv. 13-14, 22, 27)! 

Sounding Our the Word

Rev. Carl Haak

The Coming of the Son of Man

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

What is your hope for the future?

I did not ask, What *should be* your hope? No, what is your hope? What is it that you

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.

have set your eye upon? What is it that your heart desires above everything else? And toward what are you preparing and directing your life today? Is it in terms of the good life, a good-paying job, the ability to afford all that you ever wanted? Is it in terms of personal goals: success, advancement in a certain field, honor, renown? Or, perhaps, is

it in terms of family: marriage, children, seeing your children and grandchildren doing well and being happy and successful?

What is it that is your hope for the future?

The Bible says that when you take the Word of God as a knife and open up the heart of a child of God, you will find that in that heart there beats one great hope.

That hope is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ — the one, visible, final coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the world. That is the hope of the child of God.

David already had that hope in the Old Testament. In II Samuel 23:5 he says, “for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.” He is referring there to the day that Christ would come, the day in which, the Bible says, God shall be all and in all.

We also read in the book of Revelation, as the Bible comes to its close, that the prayer of the church is this: “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.”

The hope of the child of God is the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ will come again, not to establish any type of earthly kingdom, but in judgment. He comes at the end of time. He comes to judge the wicked world. He comes to raise the bodies of all men. He comes to bring His church home, to the new heavens and the new earth.

Is that your hope?

Jesus spoke of that hope, and He spoke of His coming, especially in Matthew 24 and in Mark 13, passages that have been called the Lord’s sermon on the end of the world, or the signs of His second coming. His main object in the sermon was to establish His children in good hope. He tells us in that chapter of many hard and extremely difficult days of deception and persecution that lie ahead for the church. He says that true believers will be hated of all men. They will be persecuted, and false prophets will constantly be trying to seduce them and draw them from the faith. The Lord says, It will appear as if My church and My gospel are all but defeated. My people shall be scattered. On every side the false gospel and the evil world apparently will have the upper hand. But, He says, your courage must not fail. Even when you see the church

scattered, when it seems that the elect are going to be swept off the earth, and when false doctrines are being embraced, I am coming, and My elect shall all be gathered to Me in eternal glory. He says to us in that chapter, turn your eyes to, and set your hope and your heart upon, My coming.

I speak to you on this glorious truth of the coming of the Son of man, as Jesus speaks of it in Mark 13:24-27. “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”

The Lord tells us that He is going to return immediately after the great tribulation of His church. We read: “But in those days, after that tribulation....” And, in Matthew 24: “...immediately after the tribulation of those days...,” that is, following close on the heels of that tribulation.

The church must, according to the mind and will of Jesus Christ, undergo great testing and trial on the earth. Christ will not come until after that tribulation has taken place. We read in Revelation 6:11 that the glorified saints who have been martyred for the cause of Christ are under the altar crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true. Dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on

the earth?” And the answer is this: “White robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” Thus, the Bible teaches us that the measure of suffering appointed of God for His church must be fulfilled. According to God’s inscrutable wisdom, individually in your own life as a child of God, but also for the church as a body, there is a certain amount of suffering that is necessary. We read in I Peter 5:10, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

The Bible says that the wicked are also filling up a cup, a cup of iniquity. “To fill up their sins away: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (I Thess. 2:16). And from that cup they shall drink to all eternity. The iniquity of the world is measured in its depths especially in terms of their rejection of the Christ of God. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). The persecution of the church is

motivated by the hatred of Jesus Christ. So when the suffering of the church is fulfilled, the cup of sin of the wicked reaches its brim.

We do not know when all of this

will happen, that is, when that measure will be attained. But we know this, that when it appears as if the true church of God is

...when it appears as if the true church of God is all but driven off the earth, and when the days must be shortened for the elect's sake, it will be then, immediately, that Christ shall come.

all but driven off the earth, and when the days, as Jesus says in this chapter of Mark, must be shortened for the elect's sake, it will be then, immediately, that Christ shall come.

Because the coming of Christ is the great event toward which everything is directed by God, that coming of Christ will be accompanied by the shaking of the creation. We read that Jesus said, "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken." The powers of the heaven refer to God's hand upholding the stars and the heavens in a regular way. God, by His mighty hand, shall cast it all down. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, we read. Stars shall leave their courses. When Jesus comes, the world as it is now shall be destroyed.

The most frightening for a man without God is to see the world destroyed about him. Everything that he bases his courage upon is taken away. And he must stand before God.

When Jesus comes, there shall be the great shaking of the created world. God shall shake it up and burn it in fire. And Christ shall create the new heavens and the new earth wherein righteousness shall dwell. Hear God's Word.

In our Lord's first coming, in the womb of the virgin Mary, when He took up His residence among us, He came meek and lowly. He came the first time doing the will of the Father and, so to speak, there was not even a little twitch in the world. Apart from the heavenly angels over the fields of Bethlehem, and a handful of shepherds, no one took notice. The very Son of God, by whom all things were created and who holds all things in His hands, came into our flesh, and there was only the mooing of cattle and the sighs and groans

of the virgin Mary in childbirth. And the world went on its way.

But when our Master comes again, heaven will be shaken, stars shall fall. The sun shall not give her light, earth shall be broken on her foundations and mountains cast into the sea. For He shall appear as the Lord of glory. And you shall know Him—the One who suffered and died and rose again, the One to whom you belong now by His grace. His eyes, though brilliant and bright, will smile upon you. You will rush out, amid all the terrors around you, into His arms.

But, and hear the warning today, those who do not know Him as Savior and Lord and do not do His will shall flee from Him whose eyes are as fire. And they shall cry, "Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb."

Jesus shall come personally and bodily. We read, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." Jesus speaks there of Himself as the Son of man, referring to nothing less than His own person, as the Savior. As the Son of man, He is the second

person of the Trinity, in our flesh. He is the very one who offered Himself for us on the cross. He is the risen and ascended Lord in His glorified human nature. He shall come. In His glorified human body the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven (I Thess. 4:16). He is not coming in the last day in His Spirit as He came on the day of Pentecost. The One who walked on the earth, who touched lepers, who wrestled in prayer, who was made like unto us in all things except sin, the One who was crucified, is risen, and is glorified and is now at

God's right hand—He is coming!

Are you ready?

It will be a public coming. Visible. Notice that up to this point in the 13th chapter of Mark, Jesus has always said, "You." "You shall be hated." "Take ye heed." "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter." But now He says, "And then shall *they* see the Son of man coming...." Why does He say that? Why does He not say, "Ye shall see Him," but "They shall see Him"? Because *all* shall see Him. "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Rev. 1:7).

There shall be the resurrection of the dead, both good and evil. All nations shall be gathered before Him. Mankind in its entirety shall be assembled. All shall see Him!

When He came the first time in Bethlehem, who saw Him? A few shepherds. God, so to speak,

slipped His Son into the world unseen. But in the second coming who will see Him? *All!* Do you understand that? God will not take His church out of the world in se-

cret, but as a great and glorious and conquering host in the presence of the foe. He shall tread down our enemies.

He comes personally. He comes publicly. And He comes in great power. His coming will be majestic. Against the darkness of the sky—for the sun shall not shine—and amid the rubble of the universe, the Son of man in all of His beauty and power shall appear. That is why every eye shall see Him. They shall see Him in His glory, the outshining of all of His perfections. No wonder Paul could say in Titus 2:13 that

God will not take His church out of the world in secret, but as a great and glorious and conquering host in the presence of the foe.

we look “for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

What is our hope? Our hope is not that we are going to be snatched away in some rapture when things get too hot. But our hope is this: I shall see Him for myself. Whether I am yet alive or need to be raised from the dead, I shall see Him face to face—the mighty and the terrible One, the risen Lord, the avenger of the elect, the Shepherd of His sheep.

Think of it! All the toil and all the struggles that we have gone through will be recompensed and rewarded. The cross of afflictions and trials that we bear will be lifted by the Savior’s own hands. He will wipe away all tears from our eyes. He shall brush the dirt of the battle from our clothes. And He will say,

“Come with Me, My beloved.”

Why does He come? He comes to gather the elect. “Then shall he send his angels,” we read, “and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.” The elect—they are those whom God has chosen. They are scattered over all the earth, but no matter where they are on the earth, God shall find them. He shall send His angels to take them to Himself.

That shall be the day of final division. For the angels shall gather the elect, but they shall condemn all unbelievers to eternal hell. Every sinner marked out in his unbelief shall be destroyed. But every sinner, chosen of His grace, redeemed in His blood, brought to faith and repentance, loved of God, shall be gathered to Himself. He is coming.

Today many people have opinions about Jesus Christ. Some say He was a good man. Some say, a noble leader. Others say, a myth. In that day, when He comes, there will be just one conviction: He is the mighty Son of God, Lord of all.

In the day that He comes for us, He will make us perfectly spotless, raised with new bodies, without one blemish. And in those bodies, reunited with our souls, we shall serve Him day and night in His temple.

Is that your hope? Are you living in such a way that you are ready now? Then hear His word. Christ says, “I come. I come to be glorified in you. I will never forget you. I have chosen to dwell with you to all eternity. And soon, now, very soon, I come.”

Do you hear Him? I can’t wait!



News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Since our last “News,” three of our congregations have extended calls.

On Sunday, March 29, the Doon, IA PRC extended a call to Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, to serve, along with Rev. R. Smit, as missionary to the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines.

Rev. S. Key, pastor of the Hull, IA PRC, received a call from the Byron Center, MI PRC to become their next pastor.

The members of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, ex-

tended a call to Rev. M. Vander-Wal, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, to “come over and help” them as their next pastor.

Rev. C. Haak, presently serving as pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, declined the call extended to him to serve as pastor of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA.

Evangelism Activities

The Consistory of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC recently approved their Evangelism Committee’s plans to have lectures and case studies for the benefit of their congregation. Rev. W. Bruinsma, missionary to the PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA, presented a lecture on March 18 on the “Principles and Practices of Evangelism,” and then on

Saturday, March 21, at 4:00 P.M. Rev. A. Spriensma, Kalamazoo’s pastor, spoke on “Finding Our First Love,” followed by a catered church supper. That supper was followed by a “Hands on Learning” class for the congregation.

Congregation Activities

At its March meeting, the Council of the Byron Center, MI PRC gave approval to the formation of a First Aid Committee. The two initial members of this committee will recommend the purchase of any necessary first aid/emergency items that should be readily available at Byron Center, and also put a proper emergency procedure list together.

Byron Center also continues to investigate the possibility of an outreach into India. In late

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

March, Elder Larry Looyenga and Mr. Aric Bleyenbergh flew to India to become reacquainted with Rajasteph, his wife, and their children, along with the boys in their orphanage. Part of that visit included discussions and study of the five points of Calvinism, along with the Heidelberg Catechism. The delegates from Byron Center also hoped to meet with Pastor Izac, who lives in the area and has much interest in the Reformed faith. In addition, they also hoped to develop a plan for Rajasteph to begin an outreach program in his community. They planned to return, the Lord willing, on April 7.

The men from the Bible Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited all the men from the neighboring churches' Bible Study Societies to their annual Combined Meeting held on March 23 at Edgerton. Plans were to study "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican."

The Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI began offering valet parking for members of their congregation in mid-March. This service will be provided only on Sundays when there is inclement weather in the spring, summer, and fall, and every service next winter.

Members of the Choral Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented their annual spring concert on Sunday evening, March 29.

The Senior Singles Fellowship, made up of the "older" members of the neighboring churches in West Michigan, held their first meeting of the season on March 26 at the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. The Genesis Christian Preschoolers favored the group with a program at 12:00 noon before their luncheon get-together.

Mission Activities

Rev. R. Smit, our denomination's missionary to the Phil-

ippines, preached his inaugural sermon after his installation at the Doon, IA PRC on March 22. He chose for his text John 13:12-17, and for his theme, "Washing the Feet of the Saints."

With thankfulness to our God and with joy, the consistory of the Loveland, CO PRC, with the approval of Classis West and the synodical deputies from Classis East, took part in the organization of the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship in Spokane, WA, into an instituted church on March 31. Missionary to the Fellowship, Rev. T. Miersma, preached on Ephesians 2:20-22, on the theme, "The Habitation of God." Rev. Miersma also installed the new officebearers. Rev. R. Van Overloop read greetings from several churches and Classis West. Charter members of our newest congregation include four families, with a total of ten children and four individuals. The Fellowship chose for their name, the Covenant of Grace PRC. Mr. Ray Ezinga and Rev. R. Miersma from the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for the mission in Spokane, and Rev. R. Van Overloop and Mr. Harlow Kuiper of

the DMC, were also present for the organization.

The next scheduled visit of one of our pastors to our denomination's mission work to the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, is by Rev. S. Key and his wife, who plan to be there for the Sundays of April 12, 19, and 26, the Lord willing.

School Activities

All male confessing members of the Randolph, WI PRC were invited to a meeting on March 30 for the purpose of determining how many in their congregation were interested in investigating the feasibility of providing a high school level education for their children, and to form an official association and elect officers with a view to investigating this feasibility.

The band of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI took a spring tour of Iowa in late March. They arranged at least two concerts, one for the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, SD, and the other with the Trinity Christian High School band in Hull, IA.



Announcements

July 2009 SUMMER CLASS SERIES

"The Person and Word of the Holy Spirit"
Prof. Herman Hanko

At Hope Church, Walker
On each Tuesday in July at 7:30

Sponsored by:
The Reformed Witness Committee
Hope Protestant Reformed Church
1580 Ferndale Ave. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

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PRC
Family Conference
Edmonton, AB, Canada
July 3-5, 2009

Held at Parkland
Immanuel Christian School:
21304-35th Ave. NW
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
The Evangelism Committee of
First PRC of Edmonton
Alberta, Canada
is holding a Family Conference

July 3-5, 2009 on the following topic:

"Calvin and the Christian Family Life"

Prof. David J. Engelsma: "Calvin's Influence on the Family"

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters: "Calvin on the Catechizing of Our Children"

Rev. John P. Marcus: "Calvin on Family Discipline"

For more info visit our website: www.edmontonprc.org

Plan to Attend

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2008 appointed Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2009 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2009 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 9, 2009 at 8:30 A.M. in the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 8, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Kenneth Koole, president of the 2008 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Gerald Kuiper, 4830 Greenmoor Ct., Hudsonville, MI. Phone: (616) 669-5427.

Consistory of
Georgetown PRC
Gerald Kuiper, Clerk.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Dennis Gleason, and Larry and Terri VandeVegte, in the death of a dear wife and mother,

SHARON GLEASON.

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Rev. William Langerak,
President
Jim Holstege, Assistant Clerk

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

Reformed Witness Hour

May 2009

Date	Topic	Text
May 3	"Strengthen Each Other's Hand in God"	I Samuel 23:16-18
May 10	"Women Walking Worthy"	Ephesians 4:1
May 17	"Having Our Souls Anchored in Heaven"	Hebrews 6:20, 21
May 24	"Taking Heed to All the Flock"	Acts 20:28-31
May 31	"The Spirit-Led Are the Children of God"	Romans 8:14-16