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Rev. Michael DeVries

The covenant and Dordt Head 2, the promise

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Marital communication— The sweetest words

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Is newer better?

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Organization of Unity PRC

Mrs. Ruth Nobel, Mrs. Judy VanTil



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REFORMED
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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Taking heed to the flock

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

We recently began a new year of history, another year in the life of the church and in the life of each congregation. For many congregations this has meant the installation into office of elders and deacons, who take the place of those who have finished their term of service. Throughout my years in the ministry I have been thankful to God for the faithful, committed men He has called to serve as elders and deacons. Officebearers who meet the qualifications of Scripture are of utmost importance in the church of Jesus Christ. The welfare of a congregation is largely dependent upon the elders who serve in it. Ministers come and go through the years, but elders are men who in some cases are members of a given congregation all their lives. They give stability and continuity to the congregation. Especially upon them falls the responsibility for the church over which the Lord has placed them.

In Acts 20 we have recorded one of the most beautiful and touching speeches of the apostle Paul. Paul and his companions had left Greece and were returning to Jerusalem. He desired to be there by Pentecost. But as the ship stopped over in Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church to meet him. In this farewell speech Paul reviewed his past labors among them. He announced to them that bonds and afflictions awaited him. And then he exhorted the elders of Ephesus to take heed to the flock. For the welfare of the church today it is urgent that this exhortation be heard and obeyed: Take heed to the flock!

Paul uses the very beautiful figure of “the flock.” The Lord Jesus Himself used this figure. In Luke 12:32 Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” The flock refers to the church. In the passage before us it refers particularly to the congregation at Ephesus. God’s people are often

referred to as sheep in Scripture. The church is a flock, a body of sheep.

What characterizes a flock of sheep? Generally speaking, what is true of an individual sheep is also true of the flock itself. A flock is quite helpless, unable to care for itself. A flock of sheep is unable of itself to find proper pasture and water. It is unable properly to care for its young. A flock is incapable of protecting itself from various predators. Further, a flock of sheep is very inclined to follow. At times in their fright sheep will follow one another into harm’s way. But it is also true that a flock of sheep follows its shepherd. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. Jesus says in John 10, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” But of itself, a flock would get in all sorts of trouble and endanger itself.

These same things characterize the church. We as God’s people are unable to care for ourselves spiritually. We are unable of ourselves fully and completely to meet our needs and those of our children. We are unable to protect ourselves from enemies, wolves who would enter among us, not sparing the flock (v. 29). The church too is inclined to follow. At times we can follow each other, figuratively speaking, right over the edge of a cliff! But, by God’s grace, we follow our Shepherd—we hear His voice and we follow Him. But of ourselves, as a flock, we would get into all sorts of trouble. We would endanger ourselves; we would become lost in our wanderings; we would soon be consumed by wolves!

This means that we need—the church needs—shepherds, overseers, elders. As a congregation, we need faithful elders who know us and our needs. They must know the proper pasture for us where we shall receive the Bread of Life and the Living Water. They must know our enemies. They must be very patient and long-suffering. They must love us.

So the apostle Paul exhorts the elders to “take heed” to the flock. Literally, “turn your mind to, attend to, provide for” the flock. The elders must be devoted to meeting the needs of the flock. This involves taking proper oversight of the church. They are to exercise loving discipline. They are to see to it that all things are done

decently and in good order, according to the Word of God. They must be sure that everything is directed to the edification of the church. They must guard against those who might come into the flock with strange doctrines.

The apostle insists that they must take heed to *all* the flock. It must be all the sheep of the flock, without distinction, without partiality, without neglect or omission of any. The apostle binds every sheep upon the hearts of the elders. They must concern themselves not merely with their relatives and friends, not with a faction that clings to them, not only with the wealthy while neglecting the poor and the unassuming. They must have hearts big enough to embrace “all the flock,” also the lambs.

But notice that before the apostle exhorts the elders to take heed to the flock, he exhorts them to take heed unto *themselves*. He who is to take heed to others must first take heed to himself. An elder must be sure that things in his own life and family are handled decently and in good order. This implies, too, that the elders take a mutual oversight of each other.

The purpose of this taking heed to the flock is “to feed the church of God.” The word used here for “feed” is a broader term that has the same root as the word for “flock.” It means to tend a flock, to shepherd. It includes the idea of oversight and guidance. The elders are not only to watch over the flock, but they are to provide for it. The elders must be ready always to exhort, instruct, comfort, and guide the sheep. To do this, the elders must know the members of the congregation—their character, their problems, their needs. They must know and guard against the enemies of the flock. They must see that the congregation is fed with proper spiritual food, that only the pure doctrine is preached and taught, the whole counsel of God. They as shepherds must guide the congregation, sometimes by admonition and always by example. They must endeavor to keep the sheep on the straight and narrow way. All this care of the church of God must be done with patience, out of the motive of love.

Elders are able to feed the flock of God because they are elders—they hold an office. They represent Christ. They are given the right to feed the church of God in Christ’s name. The power and authority to feed the church of God rests, then, in the Word. In so far as they speak their own word they have no power and authority to perform their labors. Christ places elders in the church with the express purpose of speaking His Word to His people. That Word is in itself a ruling, a feeding, a guiding power for the sheep.

Thus, by the Word of Christ the elders feed the church of God. That means that in all of their work they must come with the Word! When they have to admonish those who behave themselves disorderly, they must come with the admonitions of Scripture. When they visit the sick or the sorrowing, they come with words of comfort from the Scriptures. In all their care of the flock they must do so with the Word. Only as they come with the Word do they fulfill their office. Only by the Word of God can the elders feed the church of God. That implies too that as flock, and as sheep of the flock, we must receive the elders when they come with the Word.

The first reason why the elders must take heed unto the flock is that this is the flock “over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” The office of elder is bestowed by the Spirit. They are appointed and qualified by the Holy Spirit. Elders are not man-made, but God places a man in office. The Spirit places or sets the elder as an “overseer.” That word stresses the function or duties of the office. As an overseer in the church, the elder is called to exercise spiritual oversight of the flock.

Notice, too, that literally we read, “*in or among* which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” The point is that the Holy Ghost gives this special appointment without taking elders out of the flock or raising them above it. The elders are and remain sheep of the flock. And, of course, that is why he is called also to take heed both to himself and to the whole flock. Because he is placed among the flock by the Holy Ghost, he must take heed and feed the flock. He labors in the service of God. He seeks not to please men but to receive the approval of Christ whose servant he is. Both the elders and the congregation must be mindful of this. Then the elders will be careful that they do not sinfully lord it over the church. And then the congregation will humbly submit herself to the authority of Christ manifested through them. Because elders are made overseers by the Holy Ghost, they are bound to take heed to themselves and all the flock.

But, in addition, the elders must take heed to the flock because this flock was “purchased with his own blood.” The church was bought with the price of the blood of the very Son of God! Our Lord Jesus Christ, through His death upon the cross, has purchased the church. He owns us, having paid the price of our sin and guilt. The precious flock belongs to Christ.

What a calling! What an awesome responsibility it is to be made an overseer of God’s flock, to be responsible

for feeding the church of God. That means that the elders labor as undershepherds to the Great Shepherd. As such, they are called to fulfill their office with zeal and in a spirit of humility. The flock is God's church, purchased with an infinitely precious price—the blood of the Lamb of God. Because of this, elders labor with holy fear and trembling.

Then we ought to receive our elders with gratitude to

God. We ought to labor with them knowing that their task is great. Let us pray for them. May we heed the exhortation, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

The covenant and Dordt (8) Head 2, the promise

The second head of the Canons teaches that Christ's death on the cross was an *effectual* redemption of the elect. The Canons rejected the Remonstrants' (Arminian) teaching that Christ died “for all men and every man.” The Remonstrants also maintained that not all for whom Christ died receive the saving benefits but only those who believe, which is to say, only those who fulfill the condition of faith. Accordingly, they perverted the preaching of the gospel, turning it into a general offer of salvation from God to all who hear the preaching. They insisted that God wills (desires) the salvation of all.

The Canons refute these errors first by insisting that Christ's death is a *satisfaction* of God's *justice*: Christ paid the penalty for specific sins, namely, the sins of the elect. Second, Christ's death was *substitutionary*: He died for and in the place of the elect. The atonement is, therefore, effectual and the benefits of Christ's death are for the elect, neither intended for nor available for all and every man. That in turn implies that God does not promise salvation (on the condition of faith) to all and every man who hears the gospel.

The Protestant Reformed Churches faced this concretely in 1953 when Rev. Hubert DeWolf, minister in First PRC of Grand Rapids, preached, “God promises every one of you that if you believe, you will be saved.” That is a general and a conditional promise, and the churches condemned this statement as heretical. It is noteworthy that Rev. DeWolf preached this at the time when the churches were debating the doctrine of the covenant, including whether or not the promise of the covenant is conditional.

We have previously demonstrated how significant Head 2 is in proving that the covenant is with the elect alone. For in this head the Canons teach that “Christ by the blood of the cross...confirmed the new covenant” (Art. 8). And because Christ's blood redeemed only those eternally chosen to salvation, the *covenant* that Christ *confirmed* is only with the elect.

Other teachings of Head 2 are significant for the doctrine of the covenant. We return to its treatment of the promise of the gospel.

Head 2 insists that the benefits of the atonement are only for the elect. Only the elect will ever believe, for “election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith...as the fruit and effect of election” (I, 9). In harmony with this theology, Reformed preaching proclaims the commands: “Repent! Believe in Jesus Christ!” Such preaching also proclaims the particular, unconditional promise, that is, God's promise to every believer: “Eternal life is yours” (II, 5).

This gospel is proclaimed not only in the mission setting, but in the established congregation and to covenant people. The command's emphasis is not a call to repentance and faith for the first time, as if most of the congregation are impenitent unbelievers. Almost certainly some in the congregation are unbelievers, and the commands do address them. In addition, every believing member of the congregation is a sinner in need of daily repentance. Every believer continually needs the admonition to embrace the truth, take hold of Christ and His benefits by faith. Week after week they need to hear the blessed promise grounded in the cross declared to them.

If then it is so (as the previous editorial demonstrated) that the gospel promise is made to the elect only, how does this apply to the promise in the *covenant*? May it be said to every child of believers, “God wants to save you and He promises you eternal life”?

The issue is inseparably connected with baptism. A conditional covenant theology maintains that God speaks the promise to every baptized child. Proponents of a conditional covenant insist that in baptism God—not merely the minister but God Himself—calls each child by name and speaks the promise of salvation to each child. In this, they maintain, the blessings of salvation are given to each of these children *objectively*. Salvation is there for the taking. If the child believes, he will possess and enjoy those blessings *subjectively*, that is, personally. In effect, their teaching is that a general, conditional promise is made to every child at baptism.

But can that be? Can the promise of eternal life in the *preaching* be particular (for the elect only) and unconditional (with no dependence on man), but the promise in *baptism* be general (for all) and conditional (dependent on the child’s faith)?

No, it cannot be. The proof is simple: the sacraments only confirm the preaching of the gospel. This is the explicit teaching of the other Reformed confessions. The Heidelberg Catechism makes this clear in Lord’s Day 25 stating that “the Holy Ghost...works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments” (Q&A 65).

The Belgic Confession similarly connects baptism and the preaching in Article 33:

We believe, that our gracious God, on account of our weakness and infirmities, hath ordained the sacraments for us, thereby to seal unto us His promises, and to be pledges of the good will and grace of God toward us, and also to nourish and strengthen our faith, which He hath joined to the Word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses both that which He signifies to us by His Word and that which He works inwardly in our hearts, thereby assuring and confirming in us the salvation which He imparts to us.

The sacrament of baptism cannot promise something that the preaching does not. Preaching makes the gospel promise (good news, salvation) only to believers, though many others do hear the preaching. Likewise, baptism makes the promise only to believers, not to every baptized child.

The Catechism explains further in A. 66:

The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof He may *the*

more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, namely, that He grants us freely the remission of sin and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross. [Emphasis added.]

And again:

Q. 67. Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes, indeed: *for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments*, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross. [Emphasis added.]

Notice that last part of A. 67—“the one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.” That “one sacrifice of Christ” accomplished the redemption of the elect alone, and the sacraments, directing our faith to the cross, do not promise salvation to all who are baptized or who partake of the Lord’s Supper.

The Belgic Confession explicitly teaches in Article 35 that only believers receive the blessing promised.

Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless *both are not received by all men*: the ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the sacrament—as Judas, and Simon the sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament, but not Christ who was signified by it, *of whom believers only are made partakers*. [Emphasis added.]

Here the Confession flatly rejects the conditional covenant theology of the Federal Vision, which teaches not only that the *promises* of the covenant are to every baptized child, but also that each child is *united* to Christ by the sacrament. Against that the Confession insists, “believers only are made partakers” of Christ. Believers only have the spiritual reality that is signified in the sacraments, whether baptism or the Lord’s Supper.

But take notice of the Catechism’s language when describing the sacraments in Q. 66, that they are not only “signs” but also “seals.” A seal is a guarantee of authenticity. Baptism “seals to us the promise of the gospel.” This is *God’s* seal. Those who are sealed by the sacrament have God’s guarantee that His promise to them is true, is sure, and cannot fail. A promise that cannot fail will not depend on the recipient to fulfill a condition, particularly, a spiritually dead sinner. God’s promises never fail. God promises, and He keeps the promise unfailingly.

In order to get around this significance of an un-

ing promise sealed in baptism, defenders of a conditional covenant must change the promise. They change God's word at baptism to a *promise* and a *demand*, where a threat accompanies the demand. Thus does Klaas Schilder describe God's word to each baptized child:

With the promise comes as extra the prospect of a reward, and with the demand comes as extra the threat of punishment; do this and you shall live; don't do it and the wrath of the LORD will be terrible.¹

1 "The Main Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant," p. 16 (a speech given by Schilder in 1944; translated in 1992 by T. van-

Laar.) See also Schilder, *Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger*, (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 134-150.

But there is something deeper here. At issue is the very *form* of the covenant. Schilder, and all conditional covenant theologians, view the covenant as an agreement between God and man, and therefore, conditional. The Canons have something to say about that as well.



All around us

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

John MacArthur's non-endorsement of women "pastors"

World magazine's science book of the year

John MacArthur's non-endorsement of women "pastors"

Paula White, a spiritual advisor for President Trump, has written a book titled *Something Greater*. Beth Moore is a popular Bible teacher in evangelical circles. John MacArthur was recently asked for his thoughts about these two women "pastors" and their work in light of their popularity in evangelical circles. His response accurately identifies the threat of feminism for the church and unflinchingly condemns the women who act like pastors along with those who receive them as if they are legitimate pastors.

Leonardo Blair reports for *The Christian Post*:

Lamenting what he sees as a heretical "plunge" away from biblical order, Pastor John MacArthur, who leads Grace Community Church in California, skewered popular Bible teacher Beth Moore, President Donald Trump's spiritual adviser Paula White and evangelicals who support the idea of women preachers in general.

"I think the church is caving in to women preachers. Just the other day the same thing happened with Paula White. A whole bunch of leading evangelicals endorsed her new book. She's a heretic and a prosperity preacher, three times married. What are they thinking?" MacArthur said of the televangelist who chairs the

evangelical advisory board of the Trump administration during the "Truth Matters Conference," held Oct. 16-18 at Grace Community Church. MacArthur's 50th year in pulpit ministry was also celebrated during the event.

MacArthur's reference to White comes in the wake of recent criticism of several prominent evangelical leaders, including Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, who encouraged his two million followers to support White's latest book, *Something Greater*, noting that she has lived an "interesting life."

White's book also attracted support from other prominent evangelicals such as Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Dallas, and Jerry Falwell Jr., president of Liberty University, who said on Twitter: "Paula's life is an encouragement to so many and I'm sure this book will encourage you."

MacArthur's comments on White and women in ministry, however, were sparked during a panel discussion in which he was asked to give a pithy response to Beth Moore, who is a prominent evangelical Bible teacher, author and founder of Living Proof Ministries.

The veteran Bible teacher bluntly replied: “Go home.”

He then followed that up with: “There is no case that can be made biblically for a woman preacher. Period. Paragraph. End of discussion.”

He later added, “Just because you have the skill to sell jewelry on the TV sales channel doesn’t mean you should be preaching. There are people who have certain hawking skills, natural abilities to sell, they have energy and personality and all of that. That doesn’t qualify you to preach.”

He then further explained why the concept of women preachers was so “profoundly troubling” to him: “The #MeToo movement again is the culture reclaiming ground in the church. When the leaders of evangelicalism roll over for women preachers, the feminists have really won the battle,” he said to applause.

“The primary effort in feminism is not equality. They don’t want equality. That’s why 99 percent of plumbers are men. They don’t want equal power to be a plumber. They want to be senators, preachers, congressmen, president. The power structure in a university, they want power, not equality and this is the highest location they can ascend to that power in the evangelical church and overturn what is clearly scriptural,” MacArthur explained unapologetically. “So I think this is feminism gone to church. This is why we can’t let the culture exegete the Bible.”¹

World magazine’s science book of the year

World magazine has named Michael J. Behe’s *Darwin Devolves: The New Science About DNA That Challenges Evolution* its science book of the year.² A promotional announcement of the award claims that Behe’s earlier book, *Darwin’s Black Box*, “flipped the conventional understanding that the evolutionary battle is one of science vs. faith.” Many consider rejection of Darwinian evolutionism to be a faith-based position that is anti-science, while those who adhere to Darwinian evolutionism take a position objectively rooted in science. But in *Darwin’s Black Box* Behe “showed scientifically that macroevolution is a satisfactory explanation only for those who are true believers in the words of a nineteenth century prophet.” In other words, the basis for adhering to “macroevolution,” the teaching that one “kind” of

creature evolves into a different “kind,” is not science but the unfounded claims of Charles Darwin, the nineteenth-century prophet of the religion of evolutionism. One might be tempted to say that belief in Darwinian evolutionism is faith-based in a way that is comparable to the rejection of Darwinian evolutionism. But while it is true that neither side ultimately appeals to science for the basis of its beliefs, there is no comparison between faith in the words of Charles Darwin and faith in the Word of God. The Christian holds to the solid, truthful explanation of the origin and development of the world and of all creatures great and small as recorded in the only book inspired by the Holy Spirit. Those who believe in evolutionism rest their faith on the ephemeral words of a mere man.

This is not to say that science is not worth studying. In fact, the Christian faith is more open to the honest pursuit of scientific knowledge than the evolutionist. This comes out in the interview of Dr. Behe conducted by *World* magazine in order to promote his new book. During the interview it is noted that studies show that the changes in gene structure that cause variation within a species are changes due to the breakdown or *devolution* of the gene, not the *evolution* of a gene that creates a new species. The follow-up question was then asked, “Was there ever evidence that random mutations could create?” Dr. Behe responded, “The best ‘evidence’ for natural selection: My professor in graduate school said it happened. He can’t be wrong. And everybody nods in agreement. But there was zero real evidence that Darwin’s mechanism could build anything complex.” The evolutionary scientist is often unwilling to accept the findings of scientific studies that contradict their strongly held beliefs. Instead, he uncritically accepts the claims of his graduate school professor, the twenty-first century “high priest” of the religion of Darwinism.

Christians have no reason to fear the findings of scientific investigations. Even if the findings seem to contradict what is taught in Scripture, the true Christian remains confident that the Word of God is true. But often the Christian is pleasantly unsurprised that what scientists discover is in harmony with what is recorded in Scripture. The harmony between the teaching of Scripture and what scientists have found appears to be what one can expect to read about in Behe’s new book about *devolution*.

This does not mean, of course, that one can study Scripture to learn all about what scientists study, such as the genetic changes that occur in animals. God invented science, and Christians gladly engage in scientific study in order to examine the development of animals. In the interview Behe gives a fascinating summary of

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/john-macarthur-skewers-beth-moore-paula-white-evangelicals-who-support-women-preachers.html>.

² https://world.wng.org/2019/11/darwinism_s_big_breakdown.

what has been found in the study of bears and dogs. He says about bears,

Polar bears are very similar to brown bears, so for a long time people thought the polar bear was a great example of Darwinian evolution. It's likely true the polar bear is descended from brown bears, but we didn't know how or what changed within the biology of the polar bear to allow it to adapt to its frigid region. Now we do, because the entire genomes of the grizzly and polar bears have been sequenced. It turns out, of the 17 most important changes, about three-quarters of them are degraded genes in the ancestor, the brown bear. One gene involved in making pigment in the brown bear's coat was broken, so the polar bear has a white coat. Another one involved fat metabolism. By breaking one gene, the polar bear can tolerate much higher levels of fat. So the polar bear was derived from the brown bear not so much by *evolution*, but by *devolution*.

And about dogs he says,

Popularizers of evolution said if we can breed dogs that are so different from each other and only do it in the past few hundred years, how much better could nature do? But again, we didn't know what was going on in the biology of these dogs. In the past 10 years, the entire genomes of many different dog breeds have been sequenced. And again, it turns out if you want a

Chihuahua, you can break one of the genes involved in growth. If you want French poodles with curly hair, you break a gene involved in hair growth. If you want a dog with a short muzzle, you break a gene involved in facial shape development.

Scripture does not provide us with any of this information about bears and dogs, so how can these findings be in harmony with what Scripture teaches? Scripture might not give specifics about genetics, but it does teach that each "kind" of creature was specially made by God. Therefore, Scripture rejects the idea that there are changes from one kind to another kind over a period of time, which is in harmony with what scientists observe happening in the changes of genes in animals, particularly bears and dogs. A brown bear may give rise to the polar bear, but it will never become a dog. Such a scientific finding does not have anything to do with the basis of our Christian faith, which is firmly founded on Scripture. But it is satisfying for the Christian to see some of the ways that the findings of scientists confirm the record of Scripture.

It is also instructive to take note of the exposure of Darwinian evolutionism as a faith based upon the vaporous ideas of a fallible man, not a system founded upon empirical data. This is confirmation for Christians that shifting scientific theories never make a firm foundation for our beliefs.



Pillar and ground of truth

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

The Council of Nicea (AD 325): Background

In His *incarnation*, the eternal Son of God took to Himself our human nature. The incarnation of Jesus Christ assumes that He is truly God and, therefore, is eternal.

Early in the fourth century, Arius, a priest in Alexandria, Egypt, denied that the Son of God was truly God and eternal. Arius taught that God *created* Christ as the first creature. God did so *in eternity*, in order that God might create everything else in time by Christ, the Word. Still, even though Christ was created before time, He was a creature and not God, nor eternal. In Arius' words, "There was when he was not." Arius claimed that to teach that Christ is God was to speak

of two Gods. However, Arius was wrong, in part because he ignored the clear indication of Christ's deity in the Scriptures, and in part because he tried to explain scriptural truths by using distinctions that Greek philosophers (Platonists) used.

As the bishop of Alexandria, Alexander was Arius' superior in the church. He disagreed with Arius, and called a synod of bishops in Egypt and Libya. In 320 this synod condemned Arius' views, dismissed Arius from the priesthood, and exiled him. Although theologically this synod came down on the right side of the issue, it could speak only for a small number of African churches, not for all of Christianity.

Yet the issue affected all of Christianity! As the church father Athanasius would argue, if Christ is not God, He cannot be our Savior. Christianity is a religion based on the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and Christians in every region must confess that He is God! So God sovereignly directed the affairs of history so that the entire Christian world spoke to the matter.

God did so, first, by directing Arius to travel to Caesarea and to Asia Minor, teaching his views and gathering a following. Christians in other areas than Egypt were being troubled by Arius' false teaching.

Second, in 312 God had raised up Constantine to be the Roman Emperor, and in 313 had caused Constantine to legalize and favor the Christian religion. In this God showed that He always works in history to meet a need that the church would face, before the church realizes it! For Constantine not only favored Christianity, but thought that the way to unite his empire (currently divided between East and West) was to promote the Christian religion. But the divide was not only geographical, it was also theological: the idea that Christ was not God and not eternal threatened the unity of the empire. So Constantine called the first ec-



umenical council, the Council of Nicea, which met in 325. Yet Constantine was also a tool in God's hand; as always, "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD" (Prov. 21:1). Constantine's purpose was to unite his empire; God's purpose was to give representatives of all of Christendom the opportunity to speak to the fundamental theological issue of Christ's divinity.

Next time we will examine the council itself.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Dr. Nathan Lanning, cellular and molecular biologist and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands, California

Fruit

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:4-5

We confess that we know God by two means: the most elegant book of creation and His most Holy Word. In His infinite wisdom, the Holy Spirit has incorporated many aspects of creation into His Word. When meditating on the nature of these items in the light of Scripture, it often seems that their roles in the natural world were created for the express purpose of teaching spiritual truths.

One prominent example of the coordination between natural revelation and the revealed Word is that

of fruit(s). In Scripture, fruits are bookends to the canon of Scripture, first appearing in Genesis 1:11 (...and the fruit tree yielding *fruit* after his kind") and last appearing in Revelation 22:2 ("In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of *fruits*, and yielded her *fruit* every month."). In between these chapters, fruits or fruitfulness are mentioned at least 250 more times. Scripture refers to many creatures as fruits: edible products of trees (Gen. 1:11), edible products of vines (II Kings 19:29), livestock (Deut. 28:4), children (Ps. 127:3), the entire complement of goods produced by a land (Lev. 25:19), and the abundance of living things that arise from God's sovereign care of the earth (Ps. 104:13). Men's actions, whether good or evil (Rom. 7:4, 5), and the results of men's actions, whether good (Is. 3:10) or evil (Hos. 10:13), are also described as fruits.

Significant among the many remaining biblical uses of fruits is the fruit brought forth by the preached gospel (Rom. 1:13).

This article focuses on those edible products that we call “fruits” today. So, what is a fruit? Colloquially, fruit is the category of produce that can be eaten raw, contains seeds, and tastes sweet or sour. Using this definition, apples, oranges, cherries, grapes, and watermelon are correctly considered common fruits. As is often the case, a more technical definition exists for scientific use. The textbook definition of a fruit is “a mature, ripened ovary (or group of ovaries), containing the seeds of a particular type of plant, called an angiosperm.” In order to understand this definition, we first need to understand a few details related to plant anatomy and reproduction—details that will allow us to marvel at the greatness of the Creator by observing the biological complexity required for the production of a common snack.

Angiosperms are plants that produce flowers, and the ovary of these plants is considered part of the flower and is typically located at the base of the flower petals. Ovaries contain another structure inside them called an ovule. Ovules are the flower structures where the female reproductive cells are produced and stored, and multiple ovules can be located in a single ovary. The female reproductive cells of angiosperms are notable in that they consist of a single egg, a “central cell” that contains double the genetic information as normal cells, and several other supporting cells. So, the egg and the central cell are inside an ovule, one or more of which are inside an ovary, which is underneath the flower petals. However, the simple development of an ovary, ovules, and eggs does not result in the development of a fruit. Additional structures are important for understanding what fruit are and how they are formed. One such structure is a long extension of the ovary called a style, which extends up and out of the flower. The specialized end of the style is another structure, called a stigma. It is the stigma that receives the male reproductive cells, which are also necessary for the production of fruit.

Male reproductive cells are contained inside pollen grains and consist of two cells, one called a vegetative cell and one called a generative cell. When a pollen grain lands on a stigma, the pollen grain is activated, causing the vegetative cell to develop into a long structure of its own that travels down the style, into the ovary, and then into an ovule. This long structure is called a pollen tube, and is remarkable in that it can grow at a rate of one centimeter per hour, grow up to a few inches long, and is made up of only a single cell. While the pollen tube is developing, it is carrying the generative cell, which splits into two cells, now called sperm cells. When the pollen

tube enters the ovule, the two sperm cells exit the pollen tube, enter the ovule, and engage in a process called double fertilization. This process is called “double” fertilization, because, instead of a single sperm cell combining with a single egg cell, one of the sperm cells combines with the single egg while the other sperm cell combines with the central cell. Following double fertilization, the combined egg and sperm will develop into the plant embryo, while the combined central cell and sperm will develop into a nutrient source, called the endosperm, which feeds the developing embryo.

The ovule containing the embryo and endosperm will now develop into a seed, and the ovary surrounding the ovule (or multiple ovules, depending on the type of plant) will develop into the fruit. Seed development includes the growth and division of the embryo cells inside the seed, as well as the development of a tough coat around the outside of the seed. Additionally, combinations of chemicals are deposited on the outside of the seed that will regulate how much water can pass into or out of the seed and what type of environmental conditions will induce seed germination. When the embryo inside the seed reaches a mature state (mature for an embryo), the seed and embryo become dry and enter a state of dormancy. Dormancy in seeds is an extreme decline of the embryo’s metabolism, such that only the most basic cellular process required for the embryo cells to stay alive are active, and even these processes occur slowly.

The transformation of the ovary into fruit occurs while embryos are maturing and seeds are developing. However, it is at this point that generalizations across fruit types become difficult, as different types of fruits undergo different—even opposite—developmental processes. One process that is common to all fruits is the reorganization of the ovary wall into the fruit wall, or pericarp. Yet, even pericarps differ widely between fruit types. Then fruits begin to take in and store water or release water, depending on the fruit type. Existing internal ovary structural elements are expanded and reorganized or diminished and expunged, again depending on fruit type. Finally, molecules that provide fruits with their characteristic tastes—such as sugars and acids—and aromas are produced and stored.

Here, in order to underscore just how widely varied fruits can be when following our more technical definition, it may be useful to mention some items that are technically fruits. Apples, tomatoes, coconuts, plums, dandelion “seeds,” chili peppers, acorns, olives, beans, grapefruit, and cockleburrs are all fruits by our technical definition. With just this small sampling of fruits, we can see how different the processes of pericarp formation, water management, structural

development, and flavor and aroma molecule generation can be. For example, few people would confuse the taste of a chili pepper with that of a plum. Anyone who has poked a grapefruit half with a spoon knows that they are literally bursting with stored water. On the other hand, dandelion fruit are designed to float on gentle breezes, and therefore, do not possess much water weight. Tomato pericarp (which is just below the tomato “skin”) is soft enough to bite through with virtually no effort. Yet, the pericarp of coconuts is dense enough to require a rock or machete to break through. In addition, the portion of a coconut that we eat is actually all endosperm. Both coconut milk and coconut meat are endosperm, and therefore the endosperm of coconuts constitutes a large portion of the fruit. By comparison, the endosperm of fruits like apples is only a tiny portion contained inside the seeds. Many fruit categorizations have been devised based on shared architectural similarities. For example, “aggregate fruits” like blackberries and raspberries develop from multiple ovaries of a single flower, while “multiple fruits” like pineapples are formed from two or more flowers merging together. When following the definitions for these categories of fruits, it is interesting to note that tomatoes and chili peppers are berries, while raspberries are not.

In order for us to enjoy a fruit, each of the processes described above must take place, from the development of the unique cells inside the ovule, to the journey of a pollen grain to the stigma, to the remarkable transformation of a pollen grain into a long tube perfect for the delivery of two sperm into the ovule, to the fascinating process of double fertilization, to embryo formation, to seed development, and finally to fruit development around the seeds. Today, we can even enjoy the fruits of sovereignly directed technological advances that allow for the production of seedless fruit varieties, so that

we do not have to suffer the burden of swallowing the occasional seed as we dine on our fruit salads.

While the fruits listed above are fairly common in the United States, many hundreds of fruit varieties exist across the world. Fruits such as pitaya and rambutan are becoming more widely available, and readers of the *Standard Bearer* may be familiar with durian, to name just a few “exotic” fruits. The expansion of fruit hybridization continues to introduce new fruit varieties into the market too (you may never taste a fruit sweeter than a nectaplum!).

In this context, it is interesting to speculate on the different types of fruit that were commonly eaten by biblical characters. Was the variety of fruits available to Adam immediately restricted after the Fall (other than the fruit of the tree of life, that is)? Did Noah notice a difference in varieties that returned after the flood? Did Solomon import fruit trees from faraway lands? What fruits did Jesus commonly eat? Did Paul find a new variety of fruit that he favored on one of his missionary journeys? We know that most of these individuals ate grapes and olives, and visitors to the tabernacle or Solomon’s temple would have been familiar with pomegranates (figs, it turns out, are not fruits according to our technical definition). The important point, though, is not so much which types of fruit they ate, but rather that throughout biblical history God’s people were intimately familiar with fruit, as is evidenced by the profound spiritual truths communicated to us by way of the example of fruit.

The focus of this article is not to delve into these rich spiritual truths. However, a very profitable Sunday afternoon can be had reviewing and meditating on these concepts. Thanks be to God for providing us with fruit that we can enjoy, and so that we can readily understand precious truths such as the one presented in the opening verse of this article.



When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Margaret Laning, wife, mother, and grandmother in Hull Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa

Marital communication— The sweetest words

Let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice.

Song of Solomon 2:14

There are many interpretations on the Song of Solomon, yet most would agree it contains lovely communication between a bridegroom and his bride. The two sing one

another's praise. They speak with love and respect. Their speech involves sharing personal thoughts, including inmost longings, in safety. There is mutual trust. This level of communication is a giving of oneself, a way of saying, "I want to know you and I want you to know me." There are no substitutes for heart to heart talks in marriage.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Song of Solomon is a stirring, poetic love song. It is about a man and a woman, a king and a commoner, united in marriage. Further, throughout history many commentators agree that the royal bridegroom, Solomon, is a picture of Christ (Matt. 1:1; 12:42). His country bride, the Shulamite, is a picture of the church. The close communion and love between this husband and his wife is a reflection of the perfect love of Christ for His bride, the church (Eph. 5:32).

This love is powerful. Tried and proven in the most challenging of times, Christian marital love is an enduring gift from God. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned" (Song 8:7). Yet, we are sinful and our love far from perfect. It is good to ask oneself, "Are my words sweet to *my* spouse?" Perhaps some cannot remember the last time sweet words were spoken. Surely, if a spouse does not feel love to the point that it overflows into words, then some serious self-examination is in order. May we strive for better marital communication for the sake of Christ—and for our own marriages, too, that are so under attack.

We leave the Song of Solomon for a moment to look at an important verse.

What the Song of Solomon demonstrates in marital communication, Ephesians 5 explicitly exhorts: Husbands and wives must speak with love and respect.

"Nevertheless let every one of you in particular, so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph. 5:33).

The husband desires his wife to show love by respecting him. Though he has faults and weaknesses, he wants to know she does not look down upon him. He may endure much criticism at work, but how his *wife* views him is what truly matters. It is outright refreshing in our day when a wife looks up to her husband with exceeding admiration. This is God's perfect design. He created Adam to be the head of Eve.

The wife desires her husband to show selfless, unconditional love. She has faults and weaknesses, but she is comforted by his patience and understanding. Those who cross her path may at times be rude and unkind, but it is her husband's love that she truly cares about. This, too, is God's perfect design. Eve was created to

be under the headship of her husband, to submit to his loving care and direction.

That being said, husbands most certainly desire selfless, unconditional love from their wives and wives surely desire respect from their husbands. Each spouse, by God's grace, should give generous doses of both! A husband who is truly loving his wife will honor her. A wife who is truly reverencing her husband is doing it out of love. Words of love and respect, backed by kind and thoughtful actions, are those sweet words that build up a marriage.

Solomon and his Shulamite demonstrated this. They were overjoyed to get married. For Solomon, it was "the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song 3:11). He did not view marriage as an end to his freedom, like so many do. He did not go out with buddies to indulge his sinful lusts one last mournful time. Solomon truly loved the Shulamite and his friends all knew it. She knew it, too. "He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love" (Song 2:4). In those days a banner was a large sign attached at the top of a pole and used to distinguish an army or to serve as an emblem. It could be seen from miles away. Solomon's sweet words and kind actions made his love just as obvious. He had no regrets concerning other eligible women. Rather, his heart was glad! She was his exclusive "lily among thorns."

The years pass and the love deepens. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Song 8:5). All could see that Solomon's unconditional love was such a comfort to his wife. She leaned upon him as they sojourned as one flesh. That is the beauty of married life as we get older, by God's grace. As the Shulamite spoke about her beloved, we should, too: "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Song 5:16). Marital friendship seems obvious and basic, but sadly some spouses are not friends. John Calvin said, "There is no poison more effective in alienating the affections than the thought that one is despised." It is never too late, till death do you part, to forgive and reconcile. Statements such as, "I thank God for you. You are such a dear friend" mean so much. Close companionship in marriage is a great blessing.

Friendship also means that a wife or husband does not turn a blind eye to sin. In meekness and humility, we bring the sin to our spouse's attention. After all, friends in Christ *care*. "Two are better than one.... For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow" (Eccl. 4:9, 10). We help one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We share everything and communicate with honesty and openly. We learn to lean upon the other through thick and thin.

The Shulamite respected Solomon. “Thy name is as ointment poured forth” (Song 1:3). She magnified his strengths with genuine compliments. She made him to know that he was important and special to her. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons...” (Song 2:3). We might say things like, “I love being your wife,” “I love how you handled that problem,” “What you said in devotions was so helpful for me.” Words that build up.

A critical spirit, on the other hand, squelches reverence. A woman who criticizes her husband, magnifying flaws, making it her mission to change him does not seem to comprehend his bitterness. The more the wife finds fault, the more the husband withdraws. Sometimes one might wonder if she would be satisfied with a perfect husband, if one existed. Would she respect him? Sadly, probably not, considering she is not respecting the very One who *is* perfect in every single way. Christ is telling her to reverence her husband and she is not listening to His infallible Word. This applies to a husband, too. He must put away bitterness and strife and love God by loving his wife unconditionally.

The Song of Solomon instructs how to deal with disagreements in our marriages, those “little foxes that spoil the vines.” The bridegroom knocks on the Shulamite’s door but she does not want to get up. She calls from her bed with excuses, “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?” (Song 5:2). Like the rest of us sinful creatures, she is taking her spouse for granted. Virtually all couples can attest to this to varying degrees. We need to remember just how precious our spouse is. Certainly, the bridegroom was disappointed, but he does not allow himself to be angry or spew out some snarling syntax. When difficulties arise, two wrongs never make a right. Instead, he leaves her a gift.

Meanwhile, her heart is pricked and she finally rises to the door. As her hands touch the handle, she comes into contact with an abundance of dripping, aromatic myrrh. The lovely, exquisite scent is what she compared him to earlier: “A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved to me” (Song 1:13). This thoughtful gift expressed, “I love you and am not bitter toward you.” He already forgave her, the first step in reconciliation. How romantic is that? Selfless, unconditional love is *irresistible*. She is compelled to find him.

While seeking him, she finds her friends. Sometimes friends sense a marital disagreement. There may be proper times when a spouse seeks private, godly counsel.

However, it is not honoring if she aims to debase him—even worse, publicly. Besides, her wise friends

are Titus 2 women who teach wives to love their husbands. Their counsel draws out from the Shulamite the positive things about her bridegroom. They ask, “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” (Song 5:9). She answers, “My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand” (Song 5:10). She continues to praise him for several more verses ending with, “he is altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). Instead of going the downward spiral where words are used as weapons, the Shulamite lovingly revered her husband.

By God’s grace, there is a blessed upward cycle. When a husband speaks loving, tender, honoring words, his wife is more inclined to speak sweet, supportive, and respectful words. The more his wife communicates such, the more her husband strives to live up to the honorable man his wife views him to be. The more the husband strives to live as a godly husband, the more his wife strives to be a godly helpmeet. This positive, gracious maturing takes place when the couple gives heed to love and respect one another.

So...are you a romancer or a romance naysayer? Some may think romance is ridiculous, but it exists in the Song of Solomon. When one spouse tenderly expresses a desire to be with the other, making that person feel treasured, how is that not romantic? “My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song 2:10). Make known you like being with your spouse. The reminder means a lot. Spend time with one another. Stop looking at your phone and look into each other’s “doves’ eyes.” Keep dating. It does not need to be expensive, a picnic in your yard or a park will do. Count your blessings, enjoy one another, and “come away”!

Although the Song of Solomon is written in poetic style, how you communicate is unique to who you are. A list of required lines does not exist. Speak from your heart, a heart filled with love and respect, and the message will be right. Those who maintain that a husband does not need to express his love for his wife can expect marital trouble. Those who bristle at the calling to reverence, who think it is unrealistic for today, can expect the same. May we pray for much grace remembering what our marriages ought to reflect—the loving communion of Christ with His bride, the church. It is a good witness to our children and all those around us. Good marital communication is for Christ’s sake and important in a godly marriage.



Strength of youth

Rev. Jon Mahtani, minister-on-loan to CERC in Singapore called by Grandville Protestant Reformed Church

Is newer better?

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Jeremiah 6:16

Dear discerning young people,

By the Spirit of wisdom, I ask that you use the able minds God has given you and think with me for a moment. Just think. Think about the philosophy of this world that says, “Newer is always better.” Think about the rash acceptance of everything new. Thronging the malls, the Internet sites, and even the churches are consumers of our society, craving the new. All are enamored by the shiniest, the freshest, the latest—that hottest fad on the market. Whether it be material things like new devices, apps, games, fashions, songs, books, diets, and exercises or whether it be less material things like new ideas, philosophies, perspectives, and hip worship styles, everyone seems crazy (truly irrational in their acceptance) about the new.

Do you feel yourself being swept along by that mighty current, attracted to these same new things? Stop yourself, and think! Remember to value the old. Newer is not necessarily better; in fact, the new may be extremely dangerous and even downright evil.

What many believe rashly is simply false. It is common sense that newer is not necessarily better. The shiny new car may have a manufacturer defect, thus making your second-hand car more dependable. The updated device may break within a few weeks, proving that it is not actually better. The latest fashion may expose the body to seduce—obviously not better than more modest clothing. The new stories told for entertainment may be fun but full of lies, far inferior to the old truths of His-story. The new teachings by a pastor may be fresh but full of heresy, revealing the strength of sound biblical preaching by an older man that many might find dull.

The pursuit of the new is replacing the pursuit of holiness! I urge you, young people—resist from following the trend.

Think biblically. In Acts 17:21, Paul criticizes the foolishness of the city of Athens in this way: “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” This verse shows us two reasons why it is so difficult to flee from the irrational pursuit of the new. First, it exposes our sinful nature. The Athenian is in all of us. Secondly, pressure from the masses is upon us. Addicted to the new, the world will call us “old-fashioned,” “a dinosaur,” “boring,” or some other derogatory name if we do not join them in seeking the new. When God commanded His people in the days of Jeremiah, “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls,” the people refused and said: “We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16). This is how the church world has reacted and will react to the old as they foolishly seek only the new.

Can you see the danger in this? Here it is as simply as I can put it. God is old. He is the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9). Thus, as the world rushes the church away from the old and toward the new, the church turns away from the old but true God to new but false gods. The fickle masses embrace the new, and their covetous cravings lead to more and more apostasy. Young people, I exhort you with Paul: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (II Thess. 3:14).

Before I explain the positive, think about a different extreme. There are some, perhaps those of the older generations, who might read the first part of this article and conclude erroneously that everything new is evil and that all and any change is departure from the truth. This mindset is false; it is a fear-driven over-reaction against the rash acceptance of the new. The new is not in and of itself evil and change is not always bad. II Corinthians 5:17 speaks of God making us new creatures. We are to put off the old man and put on the new man. Repenting from your sin and living a new and godly life is good. No one would deny that the new heavens and the new earth is good. The imperfect church on this earth (yes, that includes any

‘PR’ church) should be Reformed and always reforming, which may include new changes. Of course, there must be thorough study of Scripture, confessions, and church history before such modifications are implemented, but some changes may be good. Thoughtlessly accepting the new is very dangerous, but not all that is new is evil.

With this clarification, however, wisdom would be to stick with the old unless you are sure that Scripture calls for change. God calls us unto the old paths explicitly. This includes the old doctrines most of you have learned and are reviewing through catechism classes and worship services. When you hear the old teachings of God’s sovereignty, creation, predestination, particular grace, the unconditional covenant, justification by faith alone, and many more, there should stir within our hearts a new awe for the old. The old gospel should be good news to us (gospel means good news). Following the old paths also includes walking according to the old commandments of God. As everyone does what is right in his own eyes and the church world is plagued by antinomianism, the laws of Christ are despised as old-fashioned. Divorced and remarried couples join the LGBT community to mock God’s law on marriage. Parents join the terrorists to murder their own children. All are

tempted to entertain themselves with the breaking of God’s law, becoming more and more desensitized to unlawfulness. Overwhelmed with grief, we should weep when there is a compromise of God’s old, unchangeable moral code! With renewed vigor our living testimony ought to be, “O how love I thy law!”

There are many old traditions not explicitly stated as law in Scripture but that we should deem wise to continue. Church history provides much evidence of tried and true practices that over time God has used for the benefit of the church. Attendance at multiple worship services on the Sabbath, personal devotions every day, Bible study with one another, use of the King James Version, and Psalm singing with simple accompaniment in worship are a few old traditions that we ought not quickly discard. Let us be very wary of the pressure to contemporize everything.

Let every one of you young people remember this simple concept clearly as the world attempts to sweep you along with them quickly and impulsively to seek the new. It is a ploy to distract and direct away from the Ancient of Days and His old paths. Let the young and the old walk shamelessly on the same, old paths upon which our fathers have tread.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

Reformed versus Arminian missions (1) Different objects

There is much that separates the Reformed faith from Arminianism doctrinally.

Those doctrinal differences are expressed in the Canons of Dordt, which set forth the Reformed truths of unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and preservation of the saints, and that over against the Arminian denial of these biblical truths. Arminianism rejects the doctrines of sovereign grace and instead defends conditional election, universal atonement, the free will of the sinner, resistible grace, and the possibility of falling away from salvation.

As always, false doctrine affects every area of belief and practice. For that reason, the false Arminian doctrines concerning salvation influence, among other things, one’s view of missions. The Arminian differs from the Reformed view and approach in missions in at

least three areas: the objects, the goals, and the methods.

These differences stem from a more fundamental difference. Arminian doctrine is *individualistic*, and thus their approach to missions is the same. But Reformed doctrine is *covenantal*, and thus the Reformed approach to missions is covenantal. It is this fundamental difference that profoundly affects all aspects of the mission work of Reformed churches and missionaries versus Arminian ones.

In this article, we plan to consider the differences as regards the objects of mission work. We hope to consider the other two (goals and methods) in the future. The question before us now is this: To whom should we seek to bring and preach the gospel in our mission work?

The Arminian, in the work of missions, is interested in winning souls. He therefore aims at getting an indi-

vidual to make a personal decision for Christ. He attempts to bring an unbeliever to the point where he will say, “I believe in Jesus and accept Him as my personal Savior.” Each person, whether married or single, a parent or a child, in a family or alone, is urged to decide for himself. Arminianism is individualistic. In the mind of the Arminian, the norm is the salvation of individuals. They focus, therefore, on seeking to save the individual.

The doctrinal background to this approach is the Arminian’s belief in the free will of the sinner. The sinner, they claim, is not totally depraved. He is not so corrupt by nature that he is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness. It is true, they will say, that he is a sinner. But, although a sinner, he still has some good in himself and is also capable of desiring what is good. He is, therefore, able to desire salvation and to choose Christ for himself.

It is this belief in the free will of the sinner that leads to the prominence of their individualistic approach. The goal of the Arminian missionary is to persuade the individual to claim Christ as his own in order to be saved and thus to have his name written in the book of life.

The Reformed approach, however, stands in sharp contrast to this. For the object of the mission (and evangelism) work of the Reformed church and missionary is not predominantly the individual but the family.

As Reformed churches, we understand that God sovereignly saves and brings to faith in Christ, without the help of the sinner, all those whom He has eternally chosen in Christ (Acts 13:48). Thus, strictly speaking, the object of our mission work is the elect. We desire to be used of God in His work of calling the elect out of darkness and into His marvelous light. We labor with a view to the salvation of those whom God has eternally determined to save.

In addition to this, the Reformed church keeps in mind in its mission work the truth of God’s covenant. That covenant has a bearing on missions, for God’s covenant promise and purpose is to gather the elect, ordinarily, from the generations of believers and their seed. The Scriptures teach that God, in His wisdom, wills to save, not simply individuals here and there, but families. This is not to deny that election is personal, for each of the names of the elect is written in the book of life. In that sense, election is individualistic (although we prefer the word “personal”). But God has eternally purposed to save the elect, ordinarily, in families. He has determined to save parents and their children (Gen. 17:7; Mark 10:14; Acts 2:39). God, as our covenant God, takes a family approach in relation to His people (Ps. 127; Ps. 128; Prov. 24:3-4).

In light of all this, the object of Reformed mission

work is the family. That this is so in Reformed churches is evident, for example, from how we refer to the number of members in our churches and in our mission work. We do not speak of so many individuals, but we count membership by number of families.

Understanding that God purposes ordinarily to save believers and their seed, we preach the gospel of God’s sovereign grace in Christ (as much as possible) to families. Families are the objects of our labor on the mission field. Our desire is that families gather under the preaching of the Word. We see to it that not only parents and adults are instructed in the truth, but that the children are also instructed in it. The Word of God is taught and preached to believers and their seed.

This implies that Reformed mission work involves teaching the parents concerning God’s covenant and of their calling, as covenant parents, to include their children in the church. The parents are taught to see to it that their children participate in worship and are attentive to the preaching. With regard to catechism instruction, parents are instructed to have their children attend. All of this because those children, “as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God.”¹

Church members should also keep this in mind in their personal witnessing. Although any one of us might very well witness to an individual, the purpose in doing so is not only that that person might himself come to a saving knowledge of the truth, but that also his family might believe. Therefore, we also encourage and instruct that individual to witness of the truths of God’s sovereign grace in turn to his family (wife, husband, children, parents, brothers, sisters, etc.). He is especially encouraged, in light of God’s covenant promises, to bring his whole family to church so that they might hear and sit under the preaching of the gospel.

It is worth noting that many who write about missions do not take this covenantal perspective with regard to the objects of missions. Mostly they simply discuss whether the objects ought to be unbelieving individuals, or the nation (or tribe) to which the individual belongs. They do not mention the family as an object of mission work. This betrays a failure to view the covenant of grace as a central doctrine in the church and for the lives of God’s people. Thus, they also fail to see its application in the area of missions.

An exception, however, is the missiologist, R. B. Kuiper. He speaks of God’s covenant and its significance when he states: “... the doctrine of the covenant stresses the truth that in imparting saving grace to men, God, although not bound by family ties, graciously takes

1 The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 27, Q&A 74.

them into account.”² Kuiper then writes that because of this the missionary may have “the assurance that, when God begins the good work in the heart of a father or mother, He will, by and large, continue that work in the hearts of their children; yes, will impart saving grace to children’s children unto distant generations.”³

That families ought to be the object of mission work is biblical. It is made clear in especially three passages in the book of Acts. The first is Acts 10, which records Peter preaching the gospel to Cornelius. Peter not only preached to Cornelius, but also to all his kinsmen. The object of Peter’s preaching was a family. The two other passages are found in Acts 16, both in reference to the preaching of the apostle Paul. In one instance, Paul preached to Lydia “and her household.” And in the other instance, Paul preached to the Philippian jailer “and all his house.”

In their mission work, the apostles were led by the Lord to preach the gospel to families. And God often worked in the hearts of all the members of those families, causing them to attend to the preaching and to confess faith in Christ. God was fulfilling His promise to save believers and their seed.

The above passages, therefore, are not only a biblical basis for infant baptism (household baptism), but also proof for the fact that mission preaching ought to be directed to households and families. The gospel should be declared, not only to the adults, but also to their children. All ages in a family must be considered, given attention, and taught.

And yet we might add that attention ought definitely be given to the heads of those households and families. For husbands and fathers can (and should) be instrumental in teaching their families and bringing them to hear the faithful preaching of the gospel. It has been

said, “Preach to women and children, and you will have a church filled with women and children. Preach to men, and you will have a church filled with men, women, and children.” There is truth to that.

The late Rev. C. Hanks made a similar point in a pamphlet concerning missions. He states:

But then we must always follow the pattern of the Scriptures. Jesus and the apostles, for example, would never approve of the common practice of our day to try to reach the parents through the children. Jesus did say, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mark 10:14). He did not want the adults to stand in the way or to interfere with the children. But He did want the parents to bring their children to Him, also coming themselves to be taught of Him. The whole covenant idea of Scripture requires that children be reached through their parents, but not parents through the children. God gathers His church in the line of continued generations, so that when parents believed, also their children were baptized. We must not try to be wiser than God.⁴

This does not preclude the fact that God can sometimes use women to witness to their husbands and children (for example, Lydia). Nor would we deny that God can occasionally use children to witness to parents and siblings, or that God sometimes saves an individual from a family and not the whole family. But in general God works through those who are heads of households (for example, Cornelius in Acts 10; the Philippian jailer in Acts 16). This is the wise and wonderful way in which God gathers His elect in families.

The Reformed faith and the Reformed approach in missions is not individualistic, but covenantal. God, who is Himself a family God (in the Trinity), thinks in terms of families. And so must we.

2 R.B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), 44.

3 Kuiper, 51.

4 Cornelius Hanks, “Missions, or ‘I will build my church’” (Grand Rapids: Sunday School of the First Protestant Reformed Church), 19.

Special article Hope PRC (Redlands, CA) Evangelism Committee

Prison ministry labors

Last year, Rev. Koole wrote an article (*SB*, Oct. 15, 2018) regarding the deplorable state of the American prison system. He concluded the article with a reminder that “Christ can still be brought to men and women in prison. And Christ still has power in the midst of such corruption and despair to set

His people free.” This article seeks to testify of that mighty power of God.

For many years now, a committee of men at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands, has labored in a correspondence work with prisoners across the state of California and beyond. By God’s grace, the work has flour-

ished, growing from correspondence with just a couple of men to a current list of 30-40 men across 16 prisons.

The Redlands Evangelism Committee began its work of corresponding with prisoners in the spring of 2011, shortly before Rev. M. VanderWal left Redlands to serve a sister congregation. Rev. VanderWal requested that a member of the committee take over communicating with the two men he was writing, and with consistory approval, this transition was approved. Shortly after this, communication began with two other men who had come in contact with us through our “Reformed Witness” newsletter. One of those men was a leader of an “officially approved” Reformed Bible study at Calipatria State Prison. As a result of this and by God’s grace, our letters and literature had a profound impact on this group. In the spring of 2013, this group at Calipatria was split up due to a prison realignment policy that was put in place by court rulings on prison overcrowding. Two of the men who were relocated to other prisons were able to set up Bible studies in their new locations. In the Lord’s providence, this allowed our literature to find its way to new believers and more men came in contact with the distinct doctrines taught in the PRC. As RFPA books, the *Standard Bearer*, pamphlets and other literature were shared among prisoners, more men came in contact with us. The work grew enough that it was eventually split off as a subcommittee of the Evangelism Committee and presently consists of 10 men actively writing to multiple prisoners, with two elders overseeing the work.

The organization of this labor has also developed over time. The Correspondence Committee with the oversight and help of the consistory developed written guidelines for the work, covering everything from the mundane (mailing tips) to spiritual guidance. The committee continues to meet about every two months to discuss the work and exchange advice on subjects such as material to send and answers to challenging questions prisoners may have. A volunteer in the congregation transcribes Heidelberg Catechism sermons to send the prisoners. As it is nearly impossible to give audio sermons to prisoners, this is one way the committee seeks to provide “preaching” to those with whom they correspond.

This latter statement points to the primary goal of the committee in all its work: we seek to bring the Word. Our main purpose is not to line up jobs for them when they are released, or to testify to their character before parole boards. We do not send monetary assistance. We bring spiritual food, advice, comfort and exhortation, in the form of letters, pamphlets, and books; and when opportunity arises, in visits. Above all, we bring the Word. This is very important, for it sets our

approach apart from that of almost every other ministry in California prisons we are aware of.

As one can imagine, the prisoners vary significantly in their knowledge of the Reformed faith. Some are very new to the Reformed faith, while others have read and studied much, leading small Bible study groups within their prisons. Many of these Bible studies work their way through the Heidelberg Catechism. Some of the men with whom we correspond have written essays on various doctrinal topics, including amillennialism, free will, election, and the biblical condition of all mankind. Many demonstrate a deep appreciation for the unspeakable gift they possess in Christ through personal testimony in their letters, and by a humble but willing witness to others within their prison.

Many prisoners endure persecution for their beliefs. Prison administrations typically do not recognize “Reformed” as a religious group separate from anyone else who calls themselves Christian, and therefore the men are not given their own place to meet. They must choose between meeting in the prison-sanctioned chapel with a group of free-will, modernist, universalist men who are often openly hostile to the truth, or meeting by themselves informally in the yard or wherever they can find a place. Prisoners also must live in the midst of more and more openly homosexual lifestyles that have become rampant within the prison system. All this to say nothing of the physical violence that exists in many prisons.

Members of the committee have visited some of these men with whom we correspond, though the number of correspondents and the distance of many of the prisons from Redlands makes doing this with regularity difficult. Perhaps one highlight of these visits occurred in July of 2017, when Rev. B. Huizinga, then-seminarian David Noorman, and Josh Feenstra were able to visit a Reformed Bible study in Calipatria State Prison. Rev. Huizinga spoke for fifty minutes on the salvation of the woman of Samaria, Sem. Noorman spoke for forty minutes on the Parable of the Sower, and Rev. Huizinga answered questions from the inmates for forty-five minutes. And the inmates were eager for more. There were about 16 men present, and the men were “eager to learn, hungry for truth, respectful, and appreciative of our presence.”

The correspondence work itself is as much a blessing to the men on the committee as we hope it is to the prisoners to whom we write. The questions asked and discussions about doctrine that take place often deepen our own understanding of the Word. As we come to understand the circumstances of these prisoners’ lives both before and under incarceration, we are humbled at how blessed we really are, growing up in strong Chris-

tian households (through no doing of ours). Visiting a man in prison and discussing the truth with him in the middle of a large visitation room full of inmates makes us stand in awe of the mighty work of Christ to save.

We give thanks to God that He has so richly blessed our work. We could provide many quotes from letters that are cause for praise to God, but we will limit ourselves to four:

I had hoped you received my request, anticipated perhaps receiving a reply, but to actually see the envelope arrive with Hope PRC as a return address and then seeing what was inside along with your encouraging letter and Scripture references regarding Jesus Christ setting the prisoners free (and I just happen to be reading Isaiah), it brought tears to my eyes. I am free indeed.

I received your letter earlier this week, Tuesday. Thank you very much for all your wonderfully edifying words, for your letters, along with the issues of the *SBs*, and the Reformed Witness. [These] are the only real edification I really get to enjoy aside from the books, and praise be to God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ that He has given you such a heart to continue in seeking to see to any spiritual edification you can provide, for which I am very thankful for you, the committee members, the congregation, and Rev. Huizinga, in whom our Lord works mightily. Thank you for your summary on Lord's Day 42, of the eighth commandment, wonderful. It must be awesome to be able to go to the Lord's house each Sunday, *twice*, to hear the Lord speak through His faithful servant, in faithful preaching.

(The following was written after exchanging several letters on infant baptism):

The baptism of infants is therefore fully in keeping with this emphasis in the Reformed confessions on the sovereignty of grace in salvation. Baptism is primarily God's speaking to us, not our speaking to Him. It is there that He signifies and seals an operation of grace that He performs in the context of a community that He has established. How can this salvation *sola gratia* be any more graphically demonstrated than in the baptism of a tiny covenant child? Infant baptism sets before the church in sacramental shorthand the entire doctrine of God's sovereignty in the salvation of the elect.

Everything else in life is simply good. Every day I thank the Lord for His grace, calm, and strength for facing the depravity that surrounds me. In spite of where I am, I can rejoice in all that the Lord gives to me.

We know other churches in our denomination also labor in prison work, and the previously referenced *Standard Bearer* article called for our churches to consider doing more. We echo that sentiment. As our committee continues its work, we covet the *SB* readers' prayers, that God may grant wisdom and diligence to faithfully testify of God's truth, to provide words of godly encouragement, and above all, that the work may always be to His glory.

For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD (Ps. 102:19-22).

Special article

Submitted by Ruth Nobel and Judy VanTil

Organization of Unity PRC

Unity.

What a beautiful name!

At the organizational worship service on October 30, 2019, Pastor A. Lanning (Byron Center PRC) gave three reasons why this name is wonderful: when we say unity, it is a confession of an attribute of the church—its oneness, as described in the Apostle's Creed, an holy catholic church; when we say unity, we point to the church's head, Christ, since He is the foundation of unity; when we say unity, we are reminding each other of a well known text and its calling to keep the unity of the Spirit. He then preached from Ephesians 4:3, 4—"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Under the theme

"Keeping the Unity of the Spirit," we were instructed in the uniqueness of this unity—being spiritual, it has nothing to do with external similarities; the keeping of it involves a striving, positively by studying and hearing the Word, and negatively, fighting any potential destroyer of it (notably, an unruly tongue).

During the last segment of the service, the following officebearers were elected: elders—Ken Elzinga, Larry Looyenga, Bruce Lubbers, Sid Miedema, and Duane Mingerink; deacons—Jeff Booth, Phil Doezema, Rich Sleda, and Jason Vander Meulen (pictured below).

The following Sunday, November 3, we met as a new Protestant Reformed Church for the first time! In the morning, Rev. J. Slopsema preached from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 52 and Rev. R. Van Over-

loop (former pastor at Byron Center PRC) in the evening from Acts 17:11—"The Noble Receiving of the Word Preached."

God's providential hand has been evident in the rapid formation of this new congregation (9 months!). The BC PRC Long-Range Planning Committee hosted an information-gathering meeting on February 6, 2019. On February 20, Byron's Council received a letter from 27 families and 6 individuals requesting permission to form a committee to investigate starting a daughter congregation, which was approved. On February 28, a letter



was distributed informing the congregation of an informational meeting March 12 for investigating the startup of a daughter congregation. The reasons given for this recommendation were the following: the congregation is too large for the facility; the workload for the pastor and officebearers is too heavy; and should a daughter church form, it would affect further plans for Byron's building expansion. The steering committee (Duane Mingerink, Michael Kooienga, Rich Sleda, Chad Mingerink, Joe Lubbers, and Sid Miedema) worked diligently, so that the May 2 meeting agenda included the recommended perimeters for the new church's location, estimated budget, Zion Christian School as a beginning location with attendant responsibilities, and a sign-up sheet for interested members. This list exceeded the minimum required 30 families in order to begin to worship separately. The June 9 update announced the first separate worship ser-

vice! On July 7, approximately 50 families and 9 individuals met at Zion Christian School, with Byron's Council providing a rotating schedule of elders and deacons to attend and supervise these worship services. Two former pastors preached for us: Prof. D. Kuiper, from LD 41 and Rev. A. Lanning on "The Old Paths," Jeremiah 6: 16.

Our "send-off" from Byron Center was indeed "bittersweet." On June 30, Rev. Lanning's sermon on "Finally, Brethren, Farewell" (II Cor. 13: 11) was a blessing, and was followed by a time of fellowship and refreshment. Especially remarkable was the gracious spirit and desire to ascertain and follow God's will that existed throughout this transition from daughter to sister. Many letters reflected this by such comments as, "The process so far has been characterized by orderliness and brotherly love." "Please pray for the Lord's guidance in this endeavor." "Thank you to all our brothers and sisters in Christ here in BC PRC. Thank you for your fellowship, your encouragement, your admonitions, your love.... We will greatly miss this close fellowship we have enjoyed with you."

On July 28, we chose our name: Unity! On August 7, Byron Center's Council approved our request for organization and brought it to the September meeting of Classis East, where it was unanimously approved. Yet one more head-count list was compiled! The charter members, numbering 69 families, are pictured below.

We have been experiencing a full congregational life already. Besides having rich provision in the preaching (including Prof. B. Gritters, Byron Center's first pastor and Rev. A. Spriensma, former pastor), Sunday School met in the summer, and catechism and societies have begun. We have had baptisms and the Lord's Supper, a potluck/church picnic in August and other social activities, including song services. And, we have already experienced loss of loved ones. There have been a few minor "bumps in the road"—crackling microphones, dripping hot evening services and rearranging catechism/society meeting times and places, but the transition has been amazingly smooth. We are looking forward to hearing "our" Rev. Slopsema regularly open



up the biblical truths in the Heidelberg Catechism each Sunday morning, and other godly servants each evening service. We have enjoyed many visitors and new members joining us. Various committees are active, from coffee-with-cookies servers to set-up/take-down crews.

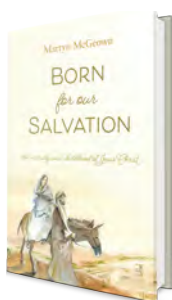
We face the future with anticipation of the next steps: calling a minister, planning and working towards a permanent worship facility—all in God’s good time and, we trust, in the unity of the Spirit.

Truly our cups overflow with God’s goodness to us!



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary



Born for our Salvation: The Nativity and Childhood of Jesus Christ, Martyn McGeown, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019. 288 pages, hardcover, \$26.95. [Reviewed by Stephan Regnerus, pastor of Lynden Protestant Reformed Church in Lynden, WA]

Rev. McGeown’s latest book, *Born for our Salvation: The Nativity and Childhood of Jesus Christ* sets forth the

rich and comforting history of the birth of Jesus Christ. We are all familiar with the narrative; most readers have celebrated the birth of Christ every Christmas for as long as they have been alive. So the question may legitimately be asked: what is the value of a book recounting the birth of Jesus Christ? Allow me to give several reasons why I found this book enriching, and for which I trust that you, the reader, will also be blessed by it.

The book is comforting. The first part of the title is suggestive of this reality. Jesus was born, not to be a spectacle on this earth, not simply to admonish and correct the evildoer, but He was *born for our salvation*. In Jesus’ conception and birth the Christian is given the hope that he will be delivered from his sins and the curse due to him for those sins. From the first chapter to the last, the book teaches in a warm and personal way the gospel truth that Jesus is the spiritual deliverer of God’s people.

The book is doctrinal. To be sure, the book does set forth the history of Jesus’ birth, and it does so in vivid fashion. McGeown writes regarding the nativity scene: “Mary gave birth amidst filth and squalor.... No cradle was prepared; no nursery was decorated; no toys were laid out; no soothing music was played; no beautiful clothes were made ready for the babe to be dressed. Instead there were animals, dung, and vermin to greet

the newborn” (80). But the book goes beyond recounting the history of Jesus’ lowly birth; it also teaches the doctrines of Jesus’ condescension and incarnation. In a day when many Christian books are filled with personal anecdotes and lengthy, distracting illustrations, Rev. McGeown’s book sticks carefully to God’s Word, explaining and applying Scripture throughout. The maps that he does use are helpful. The outstanding strength of *Born for our Salvation* is its faithful commentary on the inspired Scriptures.

The book is polemical. That is, it exposes and refutes false doctrines, which false doctrines would be used by the devil to deceive the very elect, if possible. Many Christians respond to false doctrine in one of two wrong ways. Some Christians pride themselves on being compassionate and tolerant but are largely unwilling and unable to defend the truths of Scripture. Other Christians are eager to defend and even argue about doctrine but lack the wisdom to do so in a loving manner. *Born for our Salvation* walks the middle road; it uses the sword where necessary but not as an end to itself. It is evident that the author has intimate knowledge of Roman Catholicism, for many of the polemics refute Catholicism, against whom the true church is engaged in battle to this day.

Finally, the book corrects commonly held misunderstandings about the birth of Jesus. For example, McGeown writes, “You can be sure that, contrary to sentimental hymns, [baby Jesus] cried. How else would He indicate that He was hungry or dirty?” (81). Further, the author exhorts the reader not to romanticize the birth of our Savior: “We sometimes get quite sentimental about the nativity narratives. But we must remember that this is real human history, not a fairytale, and that the men and women involved in this history had their lives turned upside down” (60).

If you only have time to read one book during the Christmas season, I recommend *Born for our Salvation*. McGeown's writing style is clear; his exegesis is sober; his applications are convicting and edifying. People of

all ages, from young adults to elderly saints, will find the book understandable and encouraging. I trust God will use this book for the furtherance of His kingdom and the glory of His holy name!



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdom, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

There is one seminarian in the newly begun Theological School in the Philippines. Brother Jeremiah Pascual and his wife Leslie joyfully received of the Lord their first child, a son named Iohanne Cauvin (Yohan Covin). According to Tricia Smit's newsletter that young man is *pogi*! So what does *pogi* mean in Tagalog? Answer later in this column.

Minister activities

Rev. E. Guichelaar received the call from Kalamazoo PRC as Rev. DeVries plans to become emeritus at the end of the year. Rev. DeVries preached his farewell sermon in the morning of January 5, with a brief program and lunch to follow.

Rev. J. Mahtani preached his farewell sermon at Cornerstone PRC December 8, and was installed as Grandville PRC's minister on loan to Singapore on December 29. The Mahtanis are hoping to leave for Singapore as soon as permission is granted by the Singapore government.

The newly organized Unity PRC formed a trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, E. Guichelaar, and R. VanOverloop. On December 18 their call was issued to Rev. VanOverloop.

With Rev. Mahtani moving to Singapore, Cornerstone PRC has formed a trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, G. Eriks, and R. Kleyn. They planned to call on January 5.

The congregation at Lacombe, AB Canada extended a call to Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh, pastor in Providence PRC, Hudsonville, MI on December 15.

Rev. Daniel Holstege and his wife Leah welcomed their new baby on December 10. Violet Joy, their fourth daughter, is doing well and is the first baby born to our missionaries in the Philippines. We thank God for caring for the mother and the newborn babe!

Church profile—watch for Hudsonville's next!

Those of you who have not yet submitted your congregational profile please do so soon, and if possible include a picture of the congregation.

Congregational activities

This is almost another trivia question. Let's say it is another trivia question: There is one congregation in the PRCA

where the current membership includes five ministers. Which congregation is that and can you name those ministers? We won't keep you in suspense. Grandville, MI PRC holds the membership of five ministers. Their present pastor is Rev. Nathan Decker. The other ministers are: Prof. Brian Huizinga, Rev. Ken Koole, Rev. Jason Kortering, and Rev. Jonathan Mahtani. That's quite a bunch. I'm guessing pulpit supply is not a problem there or anywhere close by!

Many from the Siouxland congregations of Calvary, Doon, Heritage, and Hull traveled to balmy Edgerton, MN in the evening of December 22 for the annual Christmas singspiration there. The temperature was almost 40 degrees and the roads were clear. That has not always been the case. The singing and fellowship were enjoyable as usual. Since Rev. Daniel Kleyn left Edgerton some years ago, there have been no Aussie Anzac cookies on the refreshment menu, but there were plenty of other choices—we almost didn't notice! Already looking forward to next year.

Sister-church activities

Pastor Martyn McGeown of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (Republic of Ireland) spoke at the Youth Camp of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, which took place from Saturday, December 28 to Friday, January 3. He gave seven speeches/sermons, and then preached in Brisbane EPC on the Sundays of January 5 and 12. Now that's a busy agenda!

Here is only one of many quotes taken from the bulletin of the Covenant PRC of Ballymena, Northern Ireland: "God bless your work. I watched quite a few sermons over the last months—good and truly edifying words that are always biblical, and very practical for understanding this world. I am still looking to learn more about Calvinism. I listen to the Reformed Witness Hour and it is a good source for absorbing Reformed teachings"—Finland.

Seminary activities

The seminary completed its first semester and exams in December. The January Interim class in the seminary this

year is “The Schism of 1953” taught by Prof. R. Dykstra, and is meeting January 6-10 and 13-15.

Trivia answer

If you guessed that *pogi* means “handsome,” then you are correct! If that baby would have been a she, we could

call her *maganda*, which means “beautiful” in Tagalog. There’s your Tagalog lesson for today. More trivia next time.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:3

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC in Kalamazoo, MI express their Christian sympathy to Marcia Kiel, her husband Tom, and her family in the death of Marcia’s mother **Mrs. Katherine Ekema**. May they be comforted in the words of Jesus Christ: “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
David Pryor, Clerk

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Peace PRC on Wednesday, March 4, 2020, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by February 3 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Peace’s consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Seminary

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Stephen Bylsma (phone: 616-828-3699). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 20, 2020, at 4 P.M. in the seminary, D.V.

Student Aid Committee,
Stephen Bylsma, Secretary

Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2020-2021 academic year should make application at the March 19, 2020 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

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

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 19 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

Bob Drnek, Secretary

Teacher needed

The **Edmonton PR Christian School** is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2020–2021 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–5 minus grade 4. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780.