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The land to which we go

Rev. Steven Key

The covenant and Dordt Head 2, The atonement

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Witness

Rev. William Langerak

Teaching our children to worship

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Rev. Gise J. VanBaren: In memoriam

Mr. Don Doezema



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Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado

The land to which we go

For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

Deuteronomy 11:10-12

2020! Time speeds by on our journey to our everlasting inheritance. It is important that we keep our focus on the goal toward which we run. We travel to another land. Our faithful Jehovah, by the word of His revelation, would direct our attention to that land, as He did His people Israel in the days of Moses.

The promised land is glorious! The gift of God to His people in the promised Seed, the Messiah. Look for the riches of this land not in earthly things, in the earthly land of Canaan, but in Him who is the fulfillment of the law and all the sacrifices. Tasting God's goodness, understand that He has prepared another heritage in heaven, worth more than all the world. Fix your eyes upon that land.

The land of contrast

The land to which we go is totally different from the land of Egypt.

For more than 400 years the Israelites had sojourned in the land of Egypt, a land that only produced food for its inhabitants by the laborious task of irrigating its fields. In Egypt, there was hardly any rain at all. The watering of the land was dependent upon the overflowing of the banks of the Nile, which occurred twice a year. The way in which this water was made available for the whole year was by irrigation; not by modern-day irrigation as we know it, but by actually carrying the water in buckets or clay vessels up to the fields. Large pumping wheels often were used, which were worked by the feet, and over which a long rope passed with pails attached, for drawing up the water. Those pails

were then carried to the fields and poured into ditches and trenches dug out by hand.

Thus, the Egyptians were conscious of the need for hard labor in order to see the fruits of the land. They saw the fertility of the land as being far more dependent upon the labor of human hands than upon the rain of heaven or the gift of the God of heaven.

But here Moses tells the Israelites that it shall not be so in the land of Canaan.

The land whither you go to possess it is a land directly dependent upon the Lord from day to day throughout the year.

Dependence upon the Lord is a blessing. We like to be independent. But we must see clearly that dependence upon Jehovah is a blessing indeed. Canaan was a land peculiarly adapted to Israel, which was to live in conscious dependence upon their Creator-Redeemer and upon His grace alone. Moses calls attention to this direct dependence upon Jehovah. Though in Egypt the river and the hard labor of men provided for the needs of the land, in Canaan you could do nothing but look to Jehovah for your salvation.

The land of Canaan is a land of hills and valleys, where God must be willing to send rain, not just once a year but from the beginning to the end of the year, in just the right measure. So Moses would point out to the children of Israel that all year long God calls us to Him, by making us have need of Him.

The land of Canaan is a land where the people of God are shown their distress and needs, in order that they might look to Jehovah and His goodness, and to thank Him for all His benefits. Moses would call the people to live in awe and holy fear of Jehovah, that they might call upon Him continually, submitting to His providential care and that from the beginning to the end of the year they might say, "Lord, what will become of us, if Thou bless us not?"

It is in this way that the Lord gives the land prosperity.

The land of prosperity

By the prosperity of the promised land, God's people

were pointed to spiritual prosperity, for the *physical* prosperity of the land overflowing with milk and honey was but a picture of the *spiritual* prosperity of those who dwell in this land.

In the coming year, the man or woman who lives in spiritual Egypt will have many cares. Frequently, those cares will be so heavy that they will drive a person to despair. Man lives a life of anxiety, sorrow, and disappointment, knowing that there is no happiness, no earthly comfort and provision, if he does not wear himself out in pursuit of it. Even then, any happiness he will find is but false and passing. They who dwell in Egypt, in the bondage of sin and death, will make their idols out of whatever they see as beneficial or pleasurable to them. For their own bondage and death and judgment must be pushed as far away from the consciousness as possible.

But the child of God has another land for his home. His faith, his connection with Christ, makes him a citizen of another country.

It is true, the elect remnant in Israel would face the same toils and tribulations as did the ungodly. But always those tribulations came to them as manifestations of God's abundant mercy working toward the salvation of His people. By faith true Israel cast their cares upon Jehovah, knowing that He was always caring for them, even though it was often necessary that He show His wrath toward them. They knew that Canaan was their inheritance, and that the blessings of the inheritance were, in a measure, already their possession. For their faithful God, Jehovah, had led them out of Egypt by His mighty hand and outstretched arm. Every step they took was a step guided in His infinite wisdom by the cloud and the pillar of fire. He had given them the sacrifices to point them to their Messiah yet to come. Canaan belonged to them. It was only a matter of their arrival.

No, that was not true of *all* the children of Israel. For all are not Israel which are of Israel (Rom. 9:6). But it was true of the elect remnant.

The same is true with us as we enter the year 2020. We continue our earthly sojourn toward the Canaan that is heaven. Apart from Christ we were in the bondage of Egypt, dead in trespasses and sins, enslaved to our father the devil. The land of our inheritance was hell. But when we came to Christ according to God's sovereign election of grace, drawn by the Spirit through the powerful Word of the gospel, we crossed the Red Sea and left Egypt behind. We crossed the Jordan and entered the heavenly Canaan.

As the apostle writes in Ephesians 1, we sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The state of salvation is

no longer a land of promise, but a land possessed and enjoyed. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). The inheritance is already our possession with a multitude of blessings.

It is true, there are enemies yet in Canaan, enemies yet to be driven out. Perhaps the greatest of those is the enemy of indwelling sin, which is sometimes entrenched in our hearts like deeply founded monuments and forts. There are fleshly lusts and temptations that war against the mind. There are the enemies of the devil and all his hosts.

But the land is ours, and those foes who would keep us from it shall be forever conquered by the sword of faith as the power of the victorious Christ is seen in His people. As Joshua was the leader of the Israelites when they finally came into Canaan, so *Jesus* is our victorious Leader now. He shall not put away His sword until He has taken all His people unto Himself and has given them the full possession of the land to which they go.

The earthly land of Canaan was only a picture of the heavenly. The picture fails, according to God's purpose. Entering into the earthly land of Canaan was not only the true Israel, the spiritual seed of Abraham, but the reprobate ungodly as well. Entering into the land were those who would defile it and bring the judgment of the righteous God upon it. The barrenness of Canaan gives evidence of God's judgment and punishment for the sins of the ungodly. But there awaited a rest for the people of God, a land where "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).

The spiritual elect remnant in Israel understood that too. The land of Canaan was to them a sure pledge of the heavenly life that they longed for as well as we. They, too, "looked for the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). So the purpose of this prophecy of Moses was not that the Jews would look for nothing else but earthly things, but that by tasting of God's goodness in this earthly, transitory life, they would understand that He had prepared for them another heritage in heaven, of more worth than all the world!

The land of Jehovah's care

Moses speaks of Jehovah "thy God." Do you enter the new year with that comfort? What a word this is! He who is watching me is my Shepherd. He who cares for me is my heavenly Father.

Though He be so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet in the nature of a man He

came to lead us forth from the bondage of sin and death, though the price be the blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish, the eternal, only begotten Son of God.

By the preaching of the Word He points us to the cross where we see the everlasting arms of Jehovah laying hold of us sinners and picking us up out of the mire of sin and filth unto the beauty of holiness. He is Jehovah-salvation, thy God. He points us to the land toward which we travel.

Notice, “the eyes of Jehovah thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.” Read Psalm 65:9-13. Think of God stooping down to do the work of a husbandman, a caretaker, for His people—and delighting to do it!

When we read that “the eyes of the Lord are upon it,” that means that the Lord looks upon His people in love! The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, sings the psalmist. They are upon you from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

Jehovah is the keeper of the garden of His people, the vineyard of His elect. Isaiah prophecies, “I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” Lay hold of that truth as we enter the year 2020!

And as if that needs emphasis to us weak sinners, the text has it not only “from the beginning of the year to the end of the year,” but “always.” What shall the Lord bring us in 2020? We know not. God appoints what shall come. But for us who are the citizens of the heavenly land of Canaan, toward which we journey, let this be our comfort and assurance: not for a second will the Lord remove His eyes from any one of His people.

If the Lord Jehovah looks upon us who are unworthy to be looked at, how much more ought we to look at Him, the glorious God of our salvation! How foolish, when in this land where there is so little to make one happy, we forget the very God who gives us happiness and we keep our eyes upon the frivolous cares and troubles of this perishing land. Happiness without Christ and without the consciousness of Christ’s presence is an absolute impossibility. We must have Jehovah-salvation, the Savior and caretaker of His land, of us, or we are of all men most miserable.

Set your eyes on the land toward which we journey in this coming year. So may our gracious God deal with us from the beginning of the year 2020 to the end of the year, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Editorial

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

The covenant and Dordt (7) Head 2, The atonement

At the title indicates, this series of editorials examines the harmonious relationship between the doctrine of God’s covenant of grace and the Canons of Dordt. The premise continues to be that the doctrine of the covenant of grace must agree with the doctrines of sovereign grace taught in the Canons. For the truth of God is one, unified body, and no part in it conflicts with another. In addition, God’s covenant of grace is intertwined with God’s saving work. God saves His people and brings them into the living relationship of friendship, which is His covenant life.

The doctrine of election governs all the doctrines of grace. If election is conditional, all of salvation becomes dependent on man. If election is sovereign, free, and eternal, salvation is all of God. The Canons bold-

ly and clearly set forth the truth of sovereign, double predestination. The doctrine of the covenant that is in full agreement with the Canons is the covenant doctrine governed by election. On the other hand, as has been demonstrated, the doctrine of a conditional covenant established with all the baptized children of believers conflicts with the Reformed theology of predestination taught in the Canons.

The second Head of the Canons is “Of the Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men Thereby.” Here the Canons expound another essential part of God’s saving work, namely, Christ’s atoning death on the cross. This truth is based squarely on the doctrine of election.

That relation between election and the death of Christ the Arminians recognized as well. After teach-

ing (in their first point) an election conditioned on the sinner's believing and persevering in obedience, the Remonstrants started their second point,¹ "That, *agreeably thereunto* [emphasis added], Jesus Christ...died for all men and for every man...." Their second article explains further, "that [Jesus] has obtained for them all, by His death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins...." However, recognizing that all men are not saved from sin and do not inherit eternal life, the Remonstrants added, "yet no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer...." Thus, they add a condition also here, and again it is faith. The same condition they insisted was necessary to be elect is now required in order to have the benefits that Christ obtained in the cross. Further cementing election and the atonement, the opinions of the Remonstrants on that second article state that "this redemption of the whole human race...[is] according to the *decrees, will, and grace of God the Father*"² [emphasis added].

The Canons reject this supposed redemption of all men, where only those who fill the condition of faith are actually saved.

Instead, the Canons teach the biblical doctrine of the cross by setting forth the three cardinal elements of the Reformed doctrine of the atonement: *satisfaction*, *substitution*, and *particularity*; and because of those, an atonement that is *effectual*.

Articles 1 and 2 teach that the death of Christ was a *satisfaction*. Article 1 insists that we, fallen in Adam, cannot escape "eternal punishment of body and soul... unless satisfaction be made to the justice of God." Article 2 follows:

Since, therefore, we are unable to make that *satisfaction* in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, He hath been pleased in His infinite mercy to give His only begotten Son for our surety, who was made sin, and became a curse for us and in our stead, that He might *make satisfaction to divine justice on our behalf* [emphasis added].

Christ's death is a satisfaction, that is, a payment for sin and guilt that satisfied God's justice.

Article 2 also affirms that Christ's death was *substitutionary*. This is conveyed in the words that Christ

"was made sin, and became a curse *for us* and *in our stead*" and satisfied "*on our behalf*" [emphasis added]. Christ died in our place. He went where we should have gone, to death, hell, and the grave. He bore the wrath that we deserved, God's infinite wrath against our sins. Therefore, His death was a substitutionary death.

For whom was Christ a substitute? For whose sins did He make a satisfaction? That brings us to the third cardinal element, the *particular* aspect of Christ's death. The Canons reject the Arminian theology (in the Remonstrants' second point) that Christ "died for all men and every man." In Article 8, the Canons teach that "it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross... should effectually redeem...all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father." Christ died not for all men and for every man. Rather, He died for the elect, "and those only."

Because Christ's death is a satisfaction of God's justice, a substitutionary atonement, and particular, it follows that His redemption is *effectual*. Article 8 stresses this. It speaks of the "saving efficacy of the most precious death" extending to all the elect. It testifies that Christ by His blood "should effectually redeem" those given Him. And it concludes by spelling out all the blessings that Christ gives to those for whom He died, ending with "the enjoyment of glory in His presence forever." Christ's atoning death is the salvation of everyone for whom He died.

It is significant that the Canons discuss the *preaching* of this gospel of the cross (Head 2, Art. 5; Heads 3/4, Arts. 6-10). The connection is that Christ effectually redeems everyone given Him by the Father, but salvation is by faith in Christ, and faith comes by the preaching of the gospel. The Arminians charged that the Reformed doctrine of election and of the particular atonement made preaching the gospel impossible. How can the preacher call all who hear to repent and believe in Christ if Christ did not die for each and every person? Sarcastically, they wrote:

Only those are obliged to believe that Christ died for them for whom Christ has died. The reprobates, however, as they are called, for whom Christ has not died, are not obligated to such faith, nor can they be justly condemned on account of the contrary refusal to believe this. In fact, if there should be such reprobates, they would be obliged to believe that Christ has not died for them.³

This opinion caricatures the doctrine of reprobation.

On the other hand, the Arminians presented their

1 The five points of the Remonstrants are available many places. This translation is from Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 10, 11.

2 These opinions, submitted to the Synod of Dordt, can be found in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619*, Peter Y. DeJong, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), 220-229. In addition, H.C. Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers*, 103-109.

3 DeJong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 225.

view of preaching. They insisted that when God calls in the preaching, He has “a sincere and completely un-hypocritical intention and will to save” all those who hear the preaching. God “seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel.” And, they taught, God’s “revealed will” is that all who hear the call of the gospel will repent, believe in Jesus, and thus be saved.⁴

What the Arminians taught is the essence of the “well-meant offer of the gospel” that is taught and preached almost universally in the church world today. In such preaching, it is maintained that God offers a salvation readily available to all, and God expresses His will (desire) that every hearer accept the offer, believe, and be saved. God wants to save you!

Notice that to make their position the more deceptive, the Remonstrants insisted that God “seriously” calls men to repentance and faith. If God does not call seriously, then He is hypocritical and He dissimulates.

The Canons answer most of the Remonstrant positions in Heads 3/4, and there insist that “as many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly [seriously] called” (Art. 8). In addition, the Canons speak of the *promise* of the gospel. Head 2, Article 5, states,

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

It must be made clear that in this explanation of the promise, the Canons are not giving a condition that must be fulfilled. Article 5 has been misunderstood and/or misused to teach that God promises salvation to every hearer on the condition that the hearer will believe. That, of course, is the essence of the Arminians well-meant offer of the gospel. The Canons do not teach this at all.

True it is, that the Canons insist that the gospel promise, together with the command to repent and believe, must be preached as widely as possible. To all who hear, the Reformed preacher must command, “Repent! Believe in Jesus Christ!” And he must also “declare and publish” the promise of the gospel.

However, that promise is not made to every hearer. The *commands* are directed to every hearer. The promise is published for all to *hear*. But the promise itself is for everyone who *believes* in Jesus Christ. In the Can-

ons’ the “whosoever believeth” is identifying those who receive eternal life. This is not a conditional promise. Rather, it may be compared to what a teacher might say at noon, “Whoever is sitting in row three may go out first to get lunch.” The teacher is not giving a condition to fill. She is simply identifying those who may exit first. Not all the students are allowed to exit. The benefit is only to those in row three.

Likewise the promise of the gospel. The ones promised eternal life are those who believe. The indefinite “whosoever” must not confuse the issue. The word “whosoever” expresses the beautiful truth that one need not be rich or powerful to receive eternal life. One need not be of a certain race or culture, or a particular gender or a minimum age. No, whosoever it is that believes, to that one is the promise of eternal life.

Therefore, the promise of Article 5 is *not* this: God promises to everyone that, if he believes, he will be saved. That is a general, conditional promise. That is to say, it is general, spoken as a promise of God to (and for) every hearer. And it is conditional. The promise is not certain. Whether or not one receives what God promises depends on the individual. If he fulfills the condition, and believes, he will receive the promise. If he does not, the promise is of no effect. That is a conditional promise—a promise contingent on man believing.

Contrary to all that, the Canons teach, first, that election is unconditional. God elects eternally unto salvation. To each and every elect person, God gives faith. The elect will, therefore, believe. The elect are identified as those that believe.

Second, the Canons teach that Christ died for the elect alone. According to God’s eternal purpose, Christ earned salvation, the Spirit applies that salvation, and the elect are brought “infallibly to salvation.”

There are no conditions in election. Christ died effectually to redeem the elect. God cannot, then, promise salvation to all, for salvation was earned only for the elect. God would indeed be a liar if He would offer or promise salvation to everyone who heard the gospel. He could not give salvation to all and sundry. Salvation is available only for the elect, because it was earned only for the elect.

Next time, we will examine how the Canons’ doctrine of the atonement, and the teaching on the promise, apply to the doctrine of the covenant of grace. What doctrine of the covenant is consistent with Canons Head 2? Is it the doctrine of a conditional covenant established with every baptized child, in which covenant every child receives the promise of salvation on the condition of faith? Or is it the covenant governed by election, where God speaks His promise of salvation to the elect alone?

⁴ See the Opinions of the Remonstrants, III. 8-10, H.C. Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers*, 107.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

Witness

Our Lord calls all of us to witness to Him and the gospel of salvation from sin and death by Him; and calls not only those who hold the office of minister, but all who hold the office of Christian; and to do that not only passively but actively; not only by mouth but by deed; and not only some days but every day of our life. This calling is not optional, something to choose to do or not do, accept or reject. If we are a Christian in whom the Spirit of Jesus dwells by faith, we must and will witness to our Christ and His salvation.

Our Lord calls some to witness officially in special offices, especially prophet, apostle, and minister. The righteousness of God by faith without works was witnessed by the prophets because they witnessed of Christ (Rom. 3:21; Acts 10:43). The apostles were called to witness of Jesus as those with Him from the beginning (John 15:27). And with great power they witnessed of all things He said and did, and were special eye-witnesses of His resurrection and eternal life (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 10:39; I John 1:2). Paul was called to witness what he personally saw and heard from Jesus, of things small and great, which was nothing other than what Moses and the prophets had said (Acts 22:15; 26:22). Timothy witnessed a good confession before others even as Jesus witnessed a good confession before Pilate (I Tim. 6:12-13). And by such ministers, the gospel of the kingdom continues to be preached for a witness unto all nations (Matt. 24:14).

But every individual in the church is also called to witness to Jesus and the gospel in the office of Christian. The saints listed in Hebrews 11, many who did not hold a special office, are all called a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1). The saints in heaven are called those who died for their witness of Jesus Christ and the Word (Rev. 20:4). Before He ascended, Jesus said all who received His Spirit would be witnesses of Him unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts. 1:8). And He says that we are the light of the world, that is, witnesses to the world (Matt. 5:14).

The explanation, first, is that Jesus Christ is *the* faithful and true Witness and *the* Light of the world (John

9:5). For this cause was He born and came into the world, that He should bear witness of the truth (John 18:37). He is witness of God the Father and the Spirit as the beginning of the creation and first begotten from the dead; and by words and deeds given Him to do, God the Father and God the Spirit are the two great, infallible and faithful witnesses of Him as God the Son (John 5:36-37; 10:25; Rev. 1:15; 3:14). And so also are we, His members.

The explanation, secondly, is that by the will of God the Father, the living Spirit of the resurrected Son lives in us by faith and we share in His office as Christians. As such, we witness not only passively as lights on a candlestick, but actively as persons both before the church and the world; and not only some days, but every day of our new life by word and deed. We are prophets called to confess His name; priests called to present our lives as living sacrifices of thanksgiving; and kings given power to fight against sin and Satan. One reason we must still do good works is that, saved by grace without works, by our godly life others may be gained to Christ by the witness of the whole of our conversation (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 32). Like the witness of the apostles, this new life powerfully witnesses to everything Jesus said and did, especially His resurrection life graciously given us by the will of the Father and power of His Spirit.

Paul referenced such personal witness when he said of the entire church at Thessalonica, *For from you sounded out the word of the Lord...in every place your faith to God ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything* (I Thess. 1:8). The idea is that wherever each church member went into the world for work or play, their faith also went and witnessed by word and deed so that God's Word was spread abroad.

In this coming year, let us remember we are witnesses; and that if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; and that whosoever believes in the Son has this witness of God in himself and witnesses powerfully by word and deed that God has given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son (I John 5:9-11).



I believe

Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

How do we know the Bible is the Word of God? (2) The things foretold are fulfilling

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2019, p. 111.

The Scriptures do not fear examination

If you have ever let Mormon missionaries through your door, you will have noticed that they urge upon you something that at first seems similar to the Reformed faith's "Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit." Before they read the Book of Mormon to you or tell you the story of Joseph Smith, they will attempt to prepare you for what they call, "the burning in the bosom." "This," they say, "will be a feeling you will get as we read or talk to you. This feeling shows you the Book of Mormon is divine." Then, as they read or explain, they will ask, "Did you feel it? Do you feel it now?"

Last time we saw that the Scriptures are self-authenticating. That is, they show themselves to be divine and rely on no other witness outside of themselves to establish their authority. They do this by claiming to be divine, but also by the divine way they perform their task of revealing the things of God. We also said that because we are blind in ourselves, it takes the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to believe Scripture's testimony concerning itself.

So what is the difference between this internal testimony of the Spirit and the Mormon "burning in the bosom?" First, unlike the "burning in the bosom," the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is not *mysticism*. By the power of manipulative suggestion, the Mormon missionaries often convince gullible people that they are having some mystical experience that must indicate the Book of Mormon is divine. By contrast, the internal testimony of the Spirit is not a manipulative emotion or experience, but a growing trust. It is not even necessarily perceptible until one reflects back upon it after a period of time studying the Bible. There may be something *mysterious* about its progress, as all the work of the Spirit has a certain mystery to it, but it is not *mysticism*.

Second (and closely related to the previous), the internal testimony of the Spirit is not *subjectivism*. The supposed burning of the bosom is. The burning of the bosom is not conviction that comes in conjunction with the objective qualities of the material as one carefully

examines that material and its implications. Rather, it is a purely subjective response to an initial exposure. By contrast, the Bible is not threatened by careful examination; the Spirit's powerful testimony to the truth of the Word only grows under study. To be sure, there is a subjective *element* in the internal testimony of the Spirit, but belief comes in progressive conviction from the nature of the examined material itself. It only increases as the one who examines closely sees the divine marks stamped on Scripture's form and content, that is, if one's heart has been liberated from irrational hatred of the God of the Word.

An omniscient God foretells the future

One of those marks of divinity a Christian perceives when examining Scripture is what the Belgic Confession mentions: "the things foretold in them are fulfilling" (Art. 5). Neither the Book of Mormon nor any other holy book contain such fulfilled prophecies.

When studying the Bible, one learns the God of Scripture is not bound by time and space. The Bible says God is a God, "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). This passage and others like it speak of God as determining and thus knowing all things—past, present, and future. This leads one to wonder, "If such a God revealed Himself in history, would He not be able to tell us things that He determined were to take place in the future?" In fact, one might even look for Him to do so, knowing who He is. When one studies the rest of Scripture, he learns that in this book God does exactly that. As an artist cannot help but reveal something of who he is not only in *what* he paints, but also in the *very way he paints*, so the Scriptures reveal God not only in *what* they say, but also in *how* they say it (here, by foretelling the future). The Scriptures carry within themselves the marks of the One who wrote them. Who else but a God with an eternal counsel could reveal Himself in such a way that He

accurately tells the future? And the fact that He tells the future, as one would perhaps expect an omniscient God to do, reveals a divine mark upon this book.

So, returning to Calvin's instruction on the subject, he calls our attention to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah for two outstanding examples of such prophecy and fulfillment.¹ Jeremiah 1:1-3 tells us that Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah. Jeremiah was alive when Nebuchadnezzar rolled into Jerusalem with his massive army. After Nebuchadnezzar's invasion, Jeremiah was exiled to Egypt. There, Jeremiah prophesied for a time to the Jews who had taken him to Egypt with them (against his will). Jeremiah died in Egypt long before the Jews returned home from captivity. Yet, in Jeremiah chapter 25, the prophet records God speaking through him, pronouncing that Judah would go into captivity and remain there for a specific length of time: seventy years. "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25:11-12). By Scripture's testimony and the historical record, we know that Judah was indeed in captivity to Babylon for seventy years. "Must not his tongue have been under the guidance of the Spirit of God? How shameless will it be to say that the authority of the prophets has not been confirmed by such proofs...."²

The first verse of Isaiah 1 tells us that the prophet Isaiah prophesied during the period of kings who ruled from 740-701 B.C. Isaiah finished his prophecy to the people of Judah therefore, *before* they entered captivity. Yet, the prophet's message predicted the captivity, the experience of the captivity, and the return from captivity. And not only that, Isaiah received from God the name of the king who would be born and who would let Israel return from captivity. "Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus.... For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (Is. 45:1-5). Keep in mind this is over 100 years before Cyrus is born. The explanation given for why God knows Cyrus' name 100 years before he is born is that God is the one who names him! God from eternity determined Cyrus' name, and God would

guide Cyrus' parents to give their son that name. Judah must know, God is God over this coming Cyrus, though Cyrus does not know Jehovah. And Judah must know, in the future, the God who controls the future, will use this man to keep His promise to bring Israel back to the promised land when Jeremiah's seventy years are accomplished. "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Is. 44:28).

We know from Scripture and historical record that this prophecy came true also. Hence, Calvin: "Does not this bare narrative, without any verbal embellishment, plainly show the things Isaiah recounts to be undoubted oracles of God, not the conjectures of a man?"³ And this astounds us, without even mentioning anything about Isaiah's prophecies of the virgin that shall conceive (Is. 7), the Prince of Peace (Is. 9), and the atoning, suffering Servant (Is. 53).

The very words of God

We can add to this so many other prophecies throughout the Bible: the over three hundred prophecies of Christ He fulfilled in His life, death, and resurrection; the prophecies of Daniel that foretell the rest of history (so much of which has already come to pass); the prophecy of Christ Himself that Jerusalem would fall. "Before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Is. 24:9). These prophecies are part of Scripture's own commendation of its divine claims. They come forth as so many brush strokes of an omnipotent painter as He displays the revelation of Himself. When you hold the Bible, you hold the very words of God. And you need not be pressured to say that because of a manipulated feeling in the first moment it is read to you. The Spirit is confident enough in His own work to let people dig in and see it for themselves.

Next time we will examine the unity of God's Word as another self-authenticating mark of Scripture's divine origin.

1 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.8.8.

2 Calvin, 1.8.8.

3 Calvin, 1.8.8. Because it is so astounding, this prophecy has been a lightning rod, attracting the comment of liberal scholars. The only thing they have come up with to try to discredit it is that someone else must have written the second half of Isaiah later after Cyrus was born and then went back and included it with Isaiah's prophecies. The unity of the book under the repeated naming of Isaiah as its author makes this impossible. There are books of the Bible (Psalms) that have more than one author. But in every instance where that is the case, the other author(s) are named. In addition, John 12:38-40 quotes from the part of the book in question and calls it Isaiah. And besides, the prophecies of Christ's coming by virgin birth and as atoning sacrifice cannot be subject to even this ridiculous attempt. The proof stands.



Go ye into all the world

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

The practice of elenctics (3) The confrontations

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2019, p. 93.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob...for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares....

Isaiah 2:2-4

There is a man of the world whom you encounter in your life. To be sure, we encounter many men of the world in our lives. Most of them pass by and we never see them again; or they enter our lives for a little while and then are gone again; or we see them frequently but have little to do with them. But there are others who are part of our daily lives. A coworker, a fellow student at college, a neighbor, a business associate.

You have asked about him: "What have you done with God?" You know that he knows *about* God because he too reads the elegant book of creation and has the glimmerings of natural light. But, you ask, what has he been doing with God? How does he suppress that knowledge of God? How does he flee from the presence of God? What specific lies has Satan fed him and which specific idols does he serve? You have looked for answers, not only by doing some research on his religion, but especially by observing and listening to the man himself.

You have humbly recognized that you are no better than that man of the world who holds the truth in unrighteousness. You do not look down on him, for you know that by nature you stand next to him. You recognize that you still do the same things as he does, only in different ways, and that God accepts you only because of the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. You have also made known to him that utterly important fact that you do not consider yourself better than he.

You have searched your heart, and God has shown you that what you are about to do is not motivated by the desire to prove that you are right and that man is wrong. Your motive is not to win an argument to prove your intellectual superiority, stroke your ego, or quiet your conscience that compels you to witness. But your motive is true love for that sinner and a sincere desire that he will join you, if God wills, in the halls of heaven.

You are ready to give an answer to that man with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

You are ready to confront and reprove that man of his sin.

Elenctics, not *polemics*. There is such a thing as polemics, a calling to launch the arrows of war with pen and voice from the walls of Zion to refute the gainsayers and stop the mouths of false brethren who have secretly crept into the city of our God to bewitch her inhabitants. The watchman must do that. But there is a similar calling, which some have called elenctics, according to which the believer, who has gone outside the walls of Zion into the world, who is in the world but not of the world, either as an ordained missionary or an ordinary believer, reproves that world of sin. It is the great clash of the ages, the mighty shining of the light into the darkness, in which believers say to men of all nations, "Come ye, forsake the lie, turn from idols, go up to the mountain of the Lord, the house of the God of Jacob! Come to the King of glory who lived and died for the salvation of those who have been chosen to endless life in Zion!"

Many Christians nowadays do not want to reprove the unbeliever of his sin but only want to "share the love of Jesus." That approach is faulty, first of all, because they almost invariably believe that Jesus loves every person of the world without exception. We do not believe such a love of Jesus exists for all men head for head. We know, from Scripture, that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, that Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her. We know that those elect in all nations whom Jesus loves are those whom God brings to repentance precisely by means of the word of reproof that we speak! But

this common approach of merely “sharing the love of Jesus” is also faulty because of the neglect of reproving the unbeliever of his sin. They only want to be positive. They do not want to confront. They do not want to talk about sin. But if we do not first reprove the man of this world of his sin; if there is no call to repentance, no spiritual break from his past, from his old errors, that man will carry his errors and superstitions right into the church. The result of such a procedure will be a synthesis of Christianity and paganism.

In missions and in witnessing, there must be a clash and a call to a radical, spiritual change.

How should this confrontation be done?

First of all, we to whom God gives an opportunity to clash swords with the man of this world with the motive of gaining him to Christ must remember that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:4-5). We should not confront and refute the beliefs of our neighbor by our own “wisdom of words” or “excellency of speech.” We should not try to prove that his beliefs are wrong using mere rational or emotional arguments. Some Christians in the past believed we should do that. “The apologists of the first centuries were already of the opinion that human reason, the logos, was the powerful weapon with which they could attack the heathendom of their day.”¹ Thomas Aquinas later taught that “it is possible to convince the heathen simply by appealing to reason, that there is and can be only one God, that there is justice, and a life after death. Human reason can usher a person to this threshold of faith, and the missionary does well if he convinces pagans of such matters by rational arguments.”² The Reformers broke in principle with this notion. Yet even Gisbertus Voetius, the father of Reformed missiology, wrote, “We are of the opinion that it is very useful not to begin with an exposition of our faith, but with a refutation of heathendom, and that with the assistance of reason and the natural light.”³ It is also possible that Abraham Kuyper “thought too much of a refutation, with the help of philosophical arguments, in order to demonstrate ‘intrinsic falsity’ [of a religion].”⁴ But the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, philosophical arguments.

For even if we succeed and convince a man to repudiate his errors, he would be left in a spiritual vacuum that would soon be filled with seven devils even worse than the first. For our Lord teaches that when an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, it wanders in dry places, seeking rest but finding none. Then he says, “I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.” Then he goes and calls seven more spirits which are even more wicked than himself and they enter the man and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first (Matt. 12:43-45). A man cannot exist as a spiritual vacuum. By our rational arguments we might drive out the lies he believed through the deception of one unclean spirit. But in the end, we will have only created space in his soul for the lies of seven more spirits even more wicked than the first.

No, when we clash swords with the man of this world and confront him with his sin, the weapon of our warfare must always be the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

The foundation or basis of our elenctics cannot be anything else than God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, writes J. H. Bavinck.⁵

How then do we perform the hard task of confronting and refuting the most personal beliefs of our neighbor? The same way we perform our other tasks of preaching, catechizing, counseling, and witnessing in general—*by using the Holy Scriptures*. But what if the man says that he does not believe the Bible is the Word of God? Well, of course, he will most likely say that! Nevertheless, whether that man believes it or not, the Bible is the Word of God, and therefore it is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Do you believe that, my dear brother or sister in the Lord? We must believe that although our words have no power to convince the man of his sin, the Word of God has that power. The Word of God, by which the worlds sprang into existence, has the power to change not only the mind but also the heart. Above all, the preaching of the Word of God by the minister who has been called and sent into the world with the official message of the gospel has that power. It is the power of God unto salvation. But even in our personal witnessing, the Word of God together with the Holy Spirit is the only power that will convince our neighbor of his sin and bring him to repentance. The Holy Spirit, through the Word of

1 J.H. Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1960), 223.

2 Bavinck, 224-5.

3 Bavinck, 225.

4 Bavinck, 225.

5 Bavinck, 231.

God that we speak, “will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

Therefore, when we confront the man of this world in our life, *we must use the Scriptures*. What a blessed treasure of the Scriptures has been given to us who grew up in faithful Reformed churches and homes! I grew up in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and give thanks for the awesome gift God gave me to grow up hearing the sound expositional preaching of the Scriptures every Sunday. I was catechized in the Old and New Testaments by faithful pastors who required us to memorize Bible verses. I was rooted in the Scriptures by a godly father and mother who read and discussed the Bible with us every night—and walked worthy of the gospel. I was sent to good Christian schools from kindergarten through high school. What are we to do with this treasure? Has God commanded that what He has done be passed in tradition from father to son (Ps. 78:4-6)? Yes, and this: among the nations far and wide His glory celebrate; to all the peoples of the earth His wondrous works relate (Ps. 96:1ff.).

When the opportunity comes for you to confront your neighbor in love, use the Scriptures! Take your Bible with you when you reprove him of his sin. Open your Bible, if he is willing to listen, and read a passage to him. Show him from Genesis 1 that there is a God who created the heavens and earth in the beginning in six days; and in Exodus 20 that He commands us to have no other gods before Him; and in Matthew 22 that God calls the man to turn from his atheism or agnosticism or paganism and to love Him with all his heart. Show him from John 4 that God is a Spirit whom we must worship in spirit and in truth and not through images; and perhaps from Psalm 96 bring him the call to worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. Show him from Scripture what God thinks about labor union strikes (Eph. 6), taking revenge (Rom. 12), sexual lust (Matt. 5), the love of money (I Tim. 6), the lying tongue (Prov. 6), or whatever lies and sins are obvious and prevalent in his life. Then show him from Matthew 25 or Acts 17 that on the last day God will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ whom He raised from the dead and who will return from heaven. In all of this, do not forget to tell him that you too are guilty of sin and are not better than he. After all, Romans 3 teaches that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But then show from the same chapter that you have been justified freely by God’s wondrous grace through faith in Jesus Christ without the deeds of the law.

When we clash swords with the man of this world, he might try to argue against the Word of God. Or he

might shrug, laugh, and say, “Well, that is fine for you. But I do not believe that.” Or he might frown, scowl, and say, “Don’t talk to me about your religion, and don’t judge me for my beliefs.” Or he might shout, get red in the face, and say, “Who do you think you are? Oh, you think you have all the answers, do you? You probably think I’m going to hell along with everyone else who doesn’t agree with you. You self-righteous Christians are the reason for all the problems in this world. Why don’t you just keep your religion to yourselves?”

Do these possible responses from your neighbor cause you to fear and remain silent? Do they hold you back from engaging in the confrontation? Surely, we all have to fight against this fear. I freely confess that I have to fight against this fear. Let us hold on to the sweet encouragement of our Lord: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12). Let us pray with the apostles, “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (Acts 4:29).

On the other hand, when we humbly reprove the man of this world, God might rebuke him through our words and fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that many will beat their swords into plowshares, throwing away the lies they have believed for so long and repenting of their sins. Homer Hoeksema comments on Isaiah 2:4,

When they are convicted of their sin by the judgment and rebuke of Jehovah, the God of Jacob, they will become sorry for their sin, will repent and seek forgiveness and the grace of God in Christ.... The gospel says, “You are a sinner! You are lost! Repent! If you do not repent, you will go to hell! Get on your knees!” In the way of judging and rebuking, and in no other, God creates peace.... God penetrates the heart through his judgment. God convicts the heart by his word.... The sinner responds, “Yes, Lord, it’s all true.” Then God sets the sinner’s heart straight in relation to God. He makes the sinner’s heart bemoan its sin and curse and leads the heart to the cross, where it may find peace through forgiveness and reconciliation.⁶

What a joy for us, brothers and sisters in Christ, if God would use us poor sinners to bring others to repentance!

Elenctics is not the only aspect of missions and wit-

⁶ Homer Hoeksema, *Redeemed with Judgment: Sermons on Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2007), 64-65.

nessing. There must also be with it a positive witness of the glad and hopeful tidings of the saving grace of God in Christ.

But elenctics is indeed an essential aspect of all mis-

sions and witnessing. May God give us humility, love for our neighbor, and boldness to reprove the man of the world in our life, and may He use our reproof to bring elect sinners to repentance.



When thou sittest in thine house

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Teaching our children to worship

The scene is familiar. A toddler lets out a loud wail because mom or dad poked him for being naughty in church. The more they try to quiet him, the louder he wails. Children of other families are turning around to see the fuss. Older saints are looking on in disgust. The preacher seems to have lost the attention of a large share of people around them. Suddenly, an embarrassed mother or father stands up with the crying child and walks out of the sanctuary.

Teaching our children proper behavior in church can be a frustrating task—not only for parents, but even for some preachers! What must we do to teach our children to worship quietly and reverently in church?

I sat aghast in my study while reading an article on the methods many churches use in their worship to make their children “feel welcome and to know they belong and can participate in worship.” In the past it was advised that children should be removed from the worship service altogether. Following this advice, parents were able to worship undistracted in their worship, while their children met in another room of the church and busied themselves in church school hearing stories, coloring pictures, or being involved in crafts. After many years it was found, however, that this only contributed to a loss of church membership, since the children grew up with no conviction of the need to worship.

Now there are new and supposedly improved methods of teaching children to worship.

Some churches are using what they call “pray-grounds.” These are designated areas in the front of church either on the pulpit or in front of it where children are supplied with toys that will keep them occupied while the congregation prays, sings, and listens to the preaching. It makes me wonder what happens

when two of the children fight over a toy or one grows tired of playing and decides to wander. It also makes me wonder how many people are actually listening to the preacher over the din of laughter and clanking toys. But then, other methods are suggested that may avoid these problems. “Pew boxes” can be included at the end of each row. These boxes can include coloring books, markers, paper, and a few snacks and drinks that can keep the children busy while sitting by their parent’s side. It is admitted that this too can cause major distractions during the worship service. So, a few other suggestions are made. The preacher should lower the level of his preaching to that of the children so that they can understand him. Or, children ought to be given an active part in the liturgy, such as a special number, helping take collection, reading a passage of Scripture, or other roles.

I am a simple pastor and not a “professional” in children’s ministries, but it does not take much to understand how wrong all these modern methods are. They are rooted in a false understanding of worship and its purpose. When God’s people gather together in the presence of God in His house, it is for the purpose of rendering honor, adoration, humble submission, and devotion to God as the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth. It is to pay homage unto Him, to stand in awe before Him and focus our attention solely on His name and His glory. This is done by means of prayer, songs of praise, and quietly concentrating on the preaching of the Word. God has chosen to bring glory to His name by those whom He has saved by means of worship in His house.

Consider once, the God whom we serve. He is not a man. We may not think of Him to be such a one as our-

selves (Ps. 50:21). To whom will we liken God or shall He be equal (Is. 40:12-28)? Our God is in the heavens and does whatever pleases Him (Ps. 115:3). He is Creator. He governs and directs all things by His Word and power. In His hands He holds life and death, heaven and hell. What type of attitude, then, must we teach our children when we take them into the house of God to worship? That they may play and entertain themselves in the presence of God? “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28, 29). “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling”(Ps. 2:11).

What does this require of us and our children in worship? Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 tells us: “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.” This has been forgotten in modern worship today. Man likes to hear himself rather than sitting quietly and listening to God. The Scriptures make it clear what God deems acceptable worship, yet man thinks he knows better and brings to God all kinds of his own innovations that center in himself. Modern methods of including children in worship are rooted in this false conception of worship. Ministers would do well by starting their worship service with the quote from Habakkuk 2:20, “But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” This is what must be taught to our children in order for them to worship God properly. Proper worship of God is not play time but, in the true sense of the word, pray time. It is not a time to indulge in snacks or entertainment. It is a time we set aside, adults and children alike (even the smallest of children), to pay homage unto the great and glorious God of heaven and earth before whom we bow with fear and trembling.

But, so the argument goes, such a concept of God will teach our children to be afraid of Him and hold Him at arm’s length. They will flee from before the face of this God and never learn to embrace Him. It is not difficult to give an answer to this objection: the Bible teaches us to serve God acceptably with reverence and fear. This means keeping silence before Him and listening to Him. If this is true, parents must teach their children that this is the God whom we serve—a God before whom we stand in deep reverence and awe, a God whom we respect and honor in all of life, especially when we bow before Him in worship. This great God is, for the sake of Christ, our

Father who loves us dearly. So deep is His love for us that He sent the Son of His love to die in order that we might share in His love. But even children must learn to honor and fear their earthly fathers—how much more their heavenly Father! Yet, given all this, we have not addressed the difficulty of teaching our children how to worship God properly in His house.

To answer this, first of all, we need to face the reality that there is a certain age during which our children can be fussy in church while also being too young to understand where they are much less the idea of worship. It is not improper that a church provides a nursery for these children in order that their parents can sit in the worship of the church. When I was a child, my parents took turns staying home with their children. Other churches reserve the back few rows in church or set up a row or two of chairs in the narthex where the minister can be seen and heard and yet far enough away from the rest of the congregation that if children fuss they will not disturb others in worship. These are innovative ways that deal with this age of children. This is acceptable too, as long as parents are wise enough to recognize that there is also a certain age when their children, though still small, have become old enough to be introduced into the worship of the church.

Teaching our children to worship in church begins in the home. Much emphasis today seems to be placed on individual devotions or study of God’s Word. This is good too, as long as we do not use this practice to replace another very important aspect of the Christian life: family worship. Worship in the home is foundational to teaching our children how to worship in the church. Each day (preferably when we gather together as families around the table to eat) time needs to be set aside to gather our young people and little children (toddlers too) around the Word of God and prayer. During this time, we train our tiny children to pray, but also to sit quietly as the Word of God is read and discussed. When they refuse to sit quietly and listen, they must be properly disciplined. All training takes instruction, example, and discipline. Not only is this true when the family gathers for worship around the Word of God but in general in the home too. The reason some little children are “terrors” in church is oftentimes (I know, not always) because, for lack of discipline, they are terrors in the home. Of course, proper discipline in the home does not always guarantee that a child will never raise a fuss in church, but the child will soon learn that what is true in the home will also be true in church: he will be properly disciplined.

There is more to training our children for worship in the church than simply teaching them to sit quietly

during family worship. As they grow, children must see in their parents the joy they find in attending the worship of the church. Parents sing the songs of the church in the home. They positively discuss with each other and their children the great spiritual benefit received through their worship in God's house. They extol, that is, hold in the highest esteem, the preaching of the gospel as they hear it each Lord's Day. Parents who constantly criticize the preaching teach their children that Sabbath worship is, at best, a mere formality and, at worst, worthless.

Preparing the hearts of children to worship in the church takes great effort on the part of parents in the home.

There can be no doubt that we need to train our children while they sit in church too. Suggestions can be made, but these may sound mechanical or arbitrary. Again, the example of parents is important. Do my children see me sing out the Psalms with my heart? Do they see me listening attentively to the Word preached? Do they see in me joy in worship? That goes a long way to training them. Yes, at times there will be negative reinforcement. We may need to take them out and scold them soundly or apply a slap to the backside. We do not allow them to play in church. We teach them to sit quietly and reverently. Perhaps, as they grow old enough, they can take notes. When I was in junior high school, my teacher in school required his students to take one sermon report each Sunday. The idea was opposed by a few parents, but I must say that I benefited from the requirement.

The preacher can help too. He does this not by

preaching on the level of the children. This would only serve to "dumb-down" the rest of his congregation. But the preacher can specifically say something to the children in his sermon. He can make reference to something that was taught in catechism to help reinforce what he is teaching. In catechism class too, the minister is able to teach the children the importance of worship in God's house. After all, the minister, elders, and parents are all on the same side when it comes to teaching children to sit in church and worship together with the entire congregation.

Let me end with a word of encouragement. Many visitors to our worship services have made comments to me (and others) of how many children are included in worship and how amazing that they sit quietly in church. They are even more amazed when they know our children do this two times each Lord's Day! You parents, who presently are struggling with such training, need to know that. It is not an easy task, but you are succeeding! When a minister looks out across his congregation and sees the eyes of young men and women looking back at him with knowledge while he preaches; when he hears the voices of little children singing loudly and cheerfully with the adults; when silence reigns in the church while the Word is proclaimed because God's saints are more willing to hear than to speak, there is a joy that thrills the heart of a pastor! We do not need all the gimmicks modern worship has to offer for children. Parents and children alike need to be commended that they have discovered the heart of worship: to bow humbly in fellowship with the ever-blessed God of heaven and earth to behold His beauty.



In memoriam

Mr. Don Doezema, member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan

Rev. Gise J. VanBaren: In memoriam

Rev. VanBaren. PRCA.org. RBO. P.R. Special Ed.

Not many today, I think, could put those four entities together in one short sentence. But it can be done. In fact, the *Covenant Reformed News* could well be added to the mix.

Protestant Reformed Special Ed plays an important part in the work of many of our Protestant Reformed

schools. Who today remembers, or even ever knew, that it was Rev. Gise J. VanBaren whose initiative led to the formation and development of the Special Education Society. Four girls at Hudsonville, way back when Rev. VanBaren was pastor there, needed special catechism classes. Rev. VanBaren and the consistory worked with Mrs. Gertrude Hoeksema to provide that instruction.

And out of this activity came the educating of children with special needs and the birth of the Special Ed Society.

The Reformed Book Outlet (RBO) is, significantly, in Hudsonville. During Rev. VanBaren's seventeen-year ministry there, he spent six months in Northern Ireland. While there, he met a minister who used, in his church, a bookstore as a means of outreach in the community. When he returned to Hudsonville, Rev. VanBaren, unsurprisingly, took steps to implement that concept in his own church and community. And out of that effort came the RBO.

Then there's the denominational website. Again, who today, other than those who are directly involved in the maintenance of that website, remembers, or even ever knew, that it had its beginning in the parsonage of Loveland PRC...when Rev. Gise J. VanBaren was pastor there. That was back in the mid-1990s. It started as a tool for the promoting of Loveland PRC in the community and in the state. Rev. VanBaren did have some help. He freely admitted that he started that project with what he called "one big problem," namely, that it "was something beyond the scope of the knowledge and understanding of one who received his training in the seminary." No course in computer programming there. But, he added, "I had one advantage that provided some hope of success." His son Phil was a student at the University of Michigan, where he worked with computers and had access to the University's facilities. Phil set up a website for his father. Rev. VanBaren then became web master of Loveland's new website, probably the first in the denomination. Those were the early days of the World Wide Web. Computers were slow, and transmission was accomplished via telephone. Loveland's parsonage had a single telephone line, and there was none to the church. So Rev. VanBaren got out of bed early in the morning to work on the web-page, so as to make the telephone available for church and parsonage use during the daytime and evening hours. Time? Typically from 4:00-7:00 A.M. five days a week! That's dedication. Which is taught in the seminary. He had learned well.

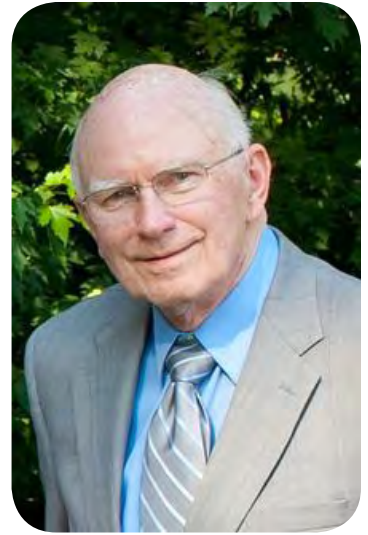
Rev. VanBaren did not stop with that. He had a heart not only for his church (Loveland) but also for the churches (the PRC). He therefore very soon added to the website of Loveland materials showing that church's denominational affiliation. Not long thereafter it occurred to him that it would be advantageous to separate the two. Loveland's site could continue on its own, which it did, and a separate site would be devoted to materials that belonged, not to a particular church, but to the denomination as a whole. This was implemented again with the help of his sons, and acquired the domain name of PRCA.org. It came, therefore, to be considered

the website of the PRC. But it wasn't yet. It was a project of one man, who built it from the ground up and maintained it single-handedly. Even, and perhaps especially, after his retirement. It became, says his wife, his main occupation. And what he built was remarkably effective. Even before the denomination adopted it as its own in 2011, the website was being accessed from 25 countries worldwide. There were

more than 200 million websites in the world at that time, and Rev. VanBaren's ranked in the top ½ of 1% of them, based on number of 'hits' recorded. Worldwide evangelism—by what is a tiny denomination of churches in North America. From Rev. VanBaren's own pen, this: "We have a marvelous tool, given us in God's grace, to spread the precious gospel message through this means. And it can go places to which we likely never would be able to go. For this we thank God."

Rev. VanBaren said it right. For this means of outreach, to the ends of the earth, we thank our God. But then we thank God also for giving us Rev. VanBaren, whose conscientious, persevering dedication to the service of God and the church brought access to this "marvelous tool" to the PRC.

But, again, with respect to the origins of all three of the above (PR Special Ed, RBO, and PRCA.org), who, today, still remembers the initiative taken, in each one, by the late Rev. Gise VanBaren? Undoubtedly part of the reason for our not even knowing about Rev. VanBaren's involvement in projects like these is the way he went about his business. Synod 2006, I think, captured it, when they passed a motion to "acknowledge and express appreciation to Rev. G. VanBaren for the countless hours that he has quietly devoted to the developing and maintaining of an attractive web page...." That's it: "*quietly*." In *all* of his labors. And unassuming. Recognition of that character of his work popped up frequently in the comments of parishioners and consistories alike in the 50th anniversary notebook that Mrs. VanBaren graciously gave me access to for the writing of this "In Memoriam." Pictures and letters. In one of those letters, the clerk of Hudsonville at that time wrote: "...we give thanks for your *quiet*, efficient leadership (emphasis added). You faithfully led us in the consistory



May 3, 1932-August 31, 2019

room.” Yes, *efficient* too. The clerk of Loveland consistory commented on Rev. VanBaren’s “dealing with problems in meetings that [his] knowledge of Robert’s Rules helps with.” Rev. VanBaren knew and honored and insisted upon the accepted rules of parliamentary procedure. Hence the orderliness of ecclesiastical assemblies when he sat in the chairman’s seat. Which, in the case of the latter, was often. Efficient...and quiet. A commendable combination. Rev. VanBaren did not *seek* the driver’s seat. But, because of his recognized leadership ability, he often found himself *put* there. It is, maybe especially, for that kind of leadership that we as a *denomination* remember Rev. Gise VanBaren.

That, however, is only one aspect of Rev. VanBaren’s long and productive ministry in the PRC. What else do we know of him?

Let’s start from the beginning. Gise J. VanBaren was born on May 3, 1932 in a house on Indiana Avenue in South Holland, IL on an onion farm. He attended the local South Holland Christian School, which at that time had two rooms, for eight grades. With, appropriately, two outhouses. And an outside well for getting water. As an aside, he learned to play the accordion in grade school—an accomplishment that at least one of his future congregations came to appreciate. He played *Whispering Hope* at Loveland’s 40th anniversary as a church.

Young Gise, after graduating from the 8th grade as valedictorian of his class, went on to Illiana Christian High, which met, in those early days, in the Civilian Conservation Corps camps in a forest preserve. Gise was part of Illiana’s third graduating class. And again he left as valedictorian. Besides, he twice, in both his junior and senior years at Illiana, won the oratorical contest involving four Christian high schools. For a future preacher, a happy combination of intellect and voice. Which also was noted by parishioners in that anniversary book. “We will never forget your powerful low voice,” one wrote. And, another: “We’ll always remember the sound, scriptural, and *powerful* preaching we were so privileged to be blest with week after week.” In catechism class too: “We remember how Rev. roared in catechism when he taught the lesson on Daniel in the lion’s den.”

Having already decided to prepare for the ministry, Gise moved from South Holland to Grand Rapids in 1950 in order to attend Calvin College. Calvin’s campus then was on Franklin Street, just east of old First Church on the corner of Franklin and Fuller. Seminary classes were being held in First Church’s basement. So, whenever his schedule at Calvin would allow it, Gise walked over to the church and audited some of them. He bore down also on his studies at Calvin, and, having taken some summer classes, graduated in just three years.

That, then, was 1953, and First Church’s basement was no longer available to the PRC. So, it was off to Adams Street School, which, because of the ‘split,’ had an empty classroom. Gise studied there under the tutelage of Rev. Hoeksema, Rev. Ophoff, Rev. Vos (for Dutch), and Rev. Heys (for hermeneutics). Because of multiple vacancies in the denomination after the split of 1953, Gise found himself preaching in the churches just a few *months* after entering seminary.

He graduated in June of 1956. First date with Clara Buiter was on the night of his graduation. He was ordained in October of that year in Doon PRC, and the now *Rev.* VanBaren tied the knot with Clara a few months later, on January 25, 1957.

Subsequent pastorates were Randolph, First G.R., Hudsonville, and, last, Loveland, from which he retired in 1999. 1956-1999—a long, faithful, and fruitful ministry.

Rev. VanBaren was not one to complain, but he did have physical afflictions to deal with for much of his life. He was born with an undeveloped optical nerve. During the time he was pastor at First Church, glaucoma developed in that eye, and while he was in Hudsonville the eye was removed. And while in college, probably when he was working during the summer loading heavy bags onto railroad cars, he injured his back. He had to struggle with back pain for the rest of his life, even after back surgery while he was pastor in Hudsonville. None of all this deterred him from soldiering on.

Rev. VanBaren was a father too. Eight children in all. With a view to the writing of this “In Memoriam,” I asked his eldest son, John, how successful he thought his father had been in navigating the daunting task of being, at the same time, both a good pastor to a congregation and a good father to a busy family. In a carefully worded written response, John began with this: “I can tell you he was a dedicated man who had very little spare time.” Dedicated, that is, to his *ministry*. “A childhood memory is of lying in bed late at night going to sleep hearing the clackity-clack of the typewriter in his study just down the hall.”

Doon was a small congregation, where his duties included leading all the societies and catechism classes, while also preparing sermons for broadcasting on the Reformed Witness Hour and writing a teachers’ guide for the Sunday School Association. And printing the bulletin. “When Mom suggested they do something special, he often had to tell her that they couldn’t, because there was another SS commentary lesson or an assigned radio sermon to finish.” That was the kind of dedication to which John referred. “But,” he said, “Dad always took his vacation time seriously, and start-

ed planning the family vacation on *January 2*. It always involved camping [in a homemade camping trailer] in National Parks somewhere, lots of hiking and outdoor activity. His favorite was Colorado.... He loved the Rockies so much,” John continued, tongue-in-cheek I’m sure, “that he ended up serving there [in Loveland] for five years.” Dedicated, Rev. VanBaren was, to his work in the church and churches...and to his family.

Rev. VanBaren had a couple of hobbies too—not golf, or fishing, or hunting, but coin collecting and stamp collecting, neither of which would occupy too much of his time or take him away from home. Stamps could be picked up from the P.O. And as for coins, well, he did teach catechism every week, and he could, and did, swap his own pocket change for coins of more interest in the catechism collection plate.

Rev. VanBaren, by the way, *enjoyed* teaching catechism. I personally well remember seeing him at Adams School (where he taught the younger catechumens after school when he was pastor at First G.R.) trucking down the hall toward his catechism room, pushing a cart carrying an overhead projector, with homemade transparencies in hand. Not only did he roar like a lion when teaching about Daniel in the lions’ den, but he captivated the little ones with his visual aids. State of the art at the time. Today he would be making masterful use of Power Point. All to make his catechism instruction come alive. And all of which would take extra hours of preparation time. Again, this was Rev. Van Baren. Dedicated. Imaginative.

Rev. VanBaren was once asked, after his retirement, what the favorite parts of his ministry had been. His response: *Preaching* was usually the highlight of the week—though it often seemed that there was not enough time to prepare adequately. And this: Pastoral visits with the members of the congregation were also enjoyable—though, again, there was hardly enough time to do all of that.

A common lament of ministers, I’m sure, but this immediate reflection by Rev. VanBaren is a clear indication of where his *heart* was. He was a preacher with a shepherd’s heart.

That his parishioners caught that, appreciated that, and remembered that, is evident from letters in that anniversary notebook I mentioned earlier. In fact, what better way to conclude this “In Memoriam” than by letting some of them express that appreciation here. A young man in Rev. VanBaren’s second charge (Randolph) recalls vividly an unannounced and unexpected visit from his pastor. The young man had a small suitcase packed and he was sitting in the kitchen of his house with his parents just prior to his leaving for the

army. “And that’s when you showed up. I never forgot that visit!” Not only that, the young man recalled also that during his time in the armed forces he would regularly receive from Rev. VanBaren a church bulletin with a personal note from his pastor on the back. “An informative letter,” he recalled years later, “that I appreciated very much.”

Then, from a former clerk of Hudsonville: “Nothing greater can be said of a pastor than that he preached the Word of God in truth on the Lord’s Day. ...the members of the congregation would [long after Rev. VanBaren left for Loveland] still say at family visitation how they had looked forward to hearing the preaching each Sunday. They enjoyed how God kept you fresh in the pulpit.” And then this: “You and your family were a wonderful example of what a Christian home should be.”

From First: “You came at a crucial time in the history of our congregation.... God used you to guide us through these troublous times and to provide stability. We flourished under your ministry.”

Even from the CPRC NI: “It was you who were instrumental in starting the *Covenant Reformed News*.... This has proved to be a real source of blessing to many.” (That’s the fourth of the startups to be credited to Rev. VanBaren.)

On the lighter side. Yes, there was a lighter side. One that would initially catch some by surprise. A parishioner in Rev. VanBaren’s last charge noted that, when he first met Rev. VanBaren “I had the idea that he was a stern man, not much for joking or bantering.” But then one Sunday, after Rev. VanBaren had been gone for a couple of weeks, the parishioner greeted him with a “Hello, stranger.” “His reply, ‘You’re kinda strange yourself.’ I knew then....”

Rev. Eriks can testify to that sense of humor. When Garry Eriks was in his last year in seminary, he had his internship under Rev. VanBaren in Loveland. “We had some enjoyable times together,” Rev. Eriks wrote in his letter, and then added this: “Rev. VanBaren, I don’t know if you remember calling a cell phone of one of the guys I was with on a trip into the mountains on a Saturday, to try to make me believe you were sick and I needed to find a sermon for the next morning.”

Ah, yes, the “stern man” could even be a practical joker. In moderation, as it always was with Rev. VanBaren, a sense of humor can help endear a man to a congregation. And, from all the letters in that notebook, it appears that it did.

What figured larger in those letters, however, was the *preaching*. I reference again the letter from a parishioner in Loveland. After making a reference to the appreciated humor, the writer wrote, “And, more impor-

tantly, we'll always remember the sound, scriptural, and powerful preaching we were so privileged to be blessed with week after week." And another, from the same congregation, after also reminiscing about fun times with Rev. VanBaren, wrote that they "remembered most of all the unabashed, unashamed proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. 'For I am determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (I Cor. 2:2)."

Rev. VanBaren was able to watch live streaming of the worship services of Trinity PRC in his room in assisted living after March of 2019. On May 12, at Rev. VanBaren's request, special effort was made for him to

be able to attend the evening worship service, in order to be *in church* for Rev. W. Langerak's first sermon as newly installed pastor there. "A Letter from Rev. VanBaren," distributed later in the congregation, had this closing comment: "Streaming is a wonderful system to be used when one cannot go to church, but there is no substitute for being part of the worship in person to feel the blessings God sends in worship."

That was Rev. VanBaren. The *church* was his *life*, to the very end. On August 31, 2019 he was carried home, where he now sees, face to face, the Savior he preached for so many years, so faithfully. We thank the Lord for Rev. Gise J. VanBaren.

Pertaining to the churches in common—sister churches

Report submitted by Elder Wee Gim Theng

Report on Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) in Singapore

The most significant event in the year 2019 for CERC in Singapore was certainly the acceptance of the call as the minister-on-loan (MOL) by Rev. Jonathan Mahtani on November 3, 2019. After many 'unsuccessful' MOL calls by the Grandville PRC (the calling church) in the past two years since Rev. Andrew Lanning took up the call at Byron Center PRC, our Jehovah God has finally answered our prayers in providing us with another undershepherd! Thanks be to God for His gracious provision! We are very excited at the prospect of having Rev. J. Mahtani and his wife Keri and family come to Singapore in the near future. We will remember the needs of Cornerstone PRC who has graciously given up their minister for our sakes. It is our prayer that God will greatly bless the ministry of Rev. Mahtani in our midst as he takes up the work in January 2020, the Lord willing. At the point of writing this report, we are still awaiting the approval for the application of the employment pass for Rev. Mahtani. The employment pass has to be approved by our government before we could 'employ' Rev. Mahtani to serve in CERC.

CERC is very thankful to God for the work of the PRCA Committee of Contact in arranging pulpit supply while we were without a minister for the past two years or so. We thank God for the PRC ministers (and their respective consistories) and professors who willingly ministered God's Word and sacraments to us. In par-

ticular, we are deeply grateful to Emeritus Rev. A. denHartog and his wife Sherry for their help over the past many months. They have sacrificially given up the time they could have spent with their loved ones in the USA to minister to our needs. Rev. denHartog, despite his age, served diligently in our midst like a full time pastor: preaching the Word and administering the sacraments, teaching catechism and membership classes, counseling and visiting the sick/indigent, conducting funeral and wake services, officiating a wedding service, speaking in church and youth camps, lecturing at the Reformation Day Conference, and even attending our Session meetings. His labor of love is greatly appreciated.

Our Jehovah God continues to bless our church through His Word and sacraments. The Lord is pleased to add to our church several covenant children and adults over the past years through baptisms and confession of faith. This year alone, we witnessed the births of six babies in our midst. We now have 186 members, of whom 41 are non-communicant members. Of these non-communicant members, 23 of them are under six years of age! We thank God for His covenant faithfulness.

Presently, two sons of our congregation are studying in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary: Josiah Tan and Marcus Wee. In October 2019, Brother Tan was granted the license to speak a word of edification in



Emeritus Rev. denHartog speaking at the Reformation Day Conference on Nov. 9, 2019 on the theme: “Personal, Practical, Profitable: The ‘Other’ Work of the Synod of Dordt.”

the churches. Do continue to pray for the grace of God for these brothers as they study for the ministry.

Year 2019 marked yet another milestone in our ecclesiastical relationship development with other churches. CERC and the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP) have formally established a sister-church relationship with one another. CERC immediately enjoyed the benefits of the new ecclesiastical relationship with Rev. Leovino Trinidad of Maranatha Protestant Reformed Church of Valenzuela City preaching for us and administering the Lord’s Supper in early September.

Our missionary pastor, Rev. Emmanuel Singh, continues to labor faithfully in Kolkata, India. The Fellowship was officially recognized by the Indian government

as the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of India, CERC on April 1, 2019. On September 15, 2019, two elders from CERC assisted Rev. Singh in the baptisms, confession of faith, and infant baptisms of nine brethren in CERC. CERC is presently working towards institution as a church. This will take place, the Lord willing, in the near future when the training of their potential elders/deacons is complete.



Our missionary-pastor Rev. Emmanuel Singh baptizing one of the candidates for adult baptism on Sept. 15, 2019. He was assisted by Elder Leong Fai Chong of CERC.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which is the smallest PRCA church to have and use a pipe organ? Answer later in this column.

Sister-church activities

Recently the CERC (Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church) in Singapore observed its 32nd Anniversary. Their confession indeed is “Great is Thy Faithfulness.” In these 32 years, Covenant went through many trials in her journey and, yet, the Lord in His graciousness has kept them until this day. As they gave thanks for His goodness to them in the past, they also continue to

pray for grace in the future. The road ahead of us, as indicated in the Word of God, will not be easy for the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. There will be more trying times ahead. Let us continue to pray for one another and help one another to remain faithful in the calling that Christ has given us. May we also encourage one another with this word: “The LORD is my portion; therefore will I hope in Him.”

Provident Protestant Reformed Church in Marikina, Philippines announced a special book sale, a one-day, end-of-the-year book sale of Reformed books (PRCA books) on Saturday, December 7. They sold books from

8 A.M. until approximately 1:00 P.M. In addition to all the RFPA books, they also had daily meditations on the creeds, Scripture puzzles and coloring books, pamphlets, and more. Those not able to come to the sale that day could obtain a list of available items and prices to order via email. Anyone was welcome to come, so all were encouraged to let others know about this sale too.

Young people's activities

Please make note of next year's Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention date and location to be hosted by Georgetown PRC. The convention will be held August 10-14, 2020 at the Lake Williamson Camp in Carlinville, IL. Visit prconvention.com for more information. Chaperone registration will open January 1, and convention registration opens March 15.

Minister activities

Rev. Ryan Barnhill was led by God to decline the call from Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, AB). On December 8, the Consistory announced a new trio: Revs. H. Bleyenbergh (Providence PRC), N. Langerak (Crete PRC), and A. Stewart (Covenant PRC, Northern Ireland).

Unity PRC, the newest member of our denomination, formed a trio consisting of Revs. Joshua Engelsma (Doon, IA PRC), Erik Guichelaar (Randolph, WI PRC),

and Rev. Ronald Van Overloop (Grace PRC of Standale, MI). They called on December 18.

With the emeritation of Rev. Michael DeVries effective at the end of the year, Kalamazoo PRC called from the trio of Pastors R. Barnhill (Peace PRC), H. Bleyenbergh (Providence PRC) and E. Guichelaar (Randolph PRC), with Rev. Guichelaar receiving this call on December 1.

Rev. J. Mahtani, who has accepted the call to be minister-on-loan to our sister church in Singapore, preached his farewell sermon at Cornerstone PRC (IN) on December 8. He was to be installed at a special service in Grandville (MI) on December 29. He and his family hope to leave for Singapore in early January 2020, pending approval of the Singapore government.

Cornerstone PRC will be calling on January 5 from the trio of Pastors J. Engelsma (Doon PRC), G. Eriks (Hudsonville PRC), and R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace PRC).

Trivia answer

You can find the trivia answer about the pipe organ in the church profile section of this column. More trivia next time.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Church profile—Edgerton, MN PRC

[With this issue we begin our church profiles. The early bird gets the worm, they say, and Edgerton was the first to submit a profile. Therefore, we publish theirs first. Thanks to Al Brummel from Edgerton for submitting this interesting information.]

In 1936 the Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches sent out the first home missionary, Rev. B. Kok. As a result, the congregation here in Edgerton, Minnesota was organized in 1938 with 13 families. After meeting for a short while in a community building, we built a church and parsonage, which are still in use today.

The parsonage was a mail-order house sold by Sears at the time. It came with plans and all the materials for the construction. The church and parsonage were built by members of the congregation.

The split of 1953 decimated the congregation and we lost the church. We met for a time in our school, which



our group had retained, but then went back to the community building for about ten years before having our church and parsonage returned to us through a court ruling in 1962.

We are probably the smallest church in the denomination that has a pipe organ. It was a used one from a theater and was installed when the church was built. One consistory member remembers reading in the

Concordia paper that the price paid for the organ was \$2,220.00 and at a congregational meeting they raised all the funds for the organ plus some extra money in one meeting. The excess money was then used to buy pulpit furniture. The organ has served the congregation well for all the years of our existence. Visitors enjoy the sound, and it has especially been appreciated during singspirations when the church was filled. [*Church News editor's note: Absolutely the best place to sing Christmas songs! Been there countless times for that.*]

Many years ago, we received and installed theater seats from First PRC Grand Rapids. They have since been replaced with more modern pews, but we still have several of them in our church basement, which are usually of interest to visitors, especially to older members of the denomination.

Our worship services are at 9:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. We have 24 families, 53 communicant members and a total membership of 85. The Adult Bible Study and Reformed Fellowship are our two active Bible studies.

We have a local Evangelism Committee and are also members of the Reformed Witness Committee consisting of the five area churches, Hull PRC and Calvary PRC, from Hull, IA, Doon PRC, Doon, IA, Heritage PRC, Sioux Falls, SD and Edgerton PRC.

Our ministers over the years have been Revs. W. Verhil, G. Vos, P. De Boer, H. Veldman, B. Woudenberg, G. Lanting, J. Slopsema, J. Smith, M. De Vries, A. Brummel, D. Kleyn, D. Lee, D. Kuiper, and currently, M. De Boer.

We acknowledge that our church exists today only because of God's covenant faithfulness. Our prayer is that our church may continue to be a light in Edgerton for generations to come.

And now a word from the church news editor to all churches: please send us your profile soon! Thanks! Your contribution can be emailed to vanegdoms@gmail.com.



Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Peter Boer in the death of his wife, **Eunice Boer**. It is our prayer that he and his extended family may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be trouble, neither let it be afraid."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Mike Moelker, Clerk

Announcements continued

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC express our Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Jon Hop and to his wife Cori in the death of his mother-in-law **Emma DeVries**. “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8).

Rev. David Overway, President
David Moelker, Clerk

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.

Teacher needed

Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for teaching positions in the 2020-21 school year. There is a particular need in the area of Mathematics but applications will be accepted from those with secondary certification in other subject areas. Those who are interested are encouraged to contact Mr. Rick Noorman, Administrator, or Dr. Brian Decker, Education Committee, for more information. Email contacts are ricknoorman@gmail.com or call 616-453-5048 and deckerbj@gmail.com.

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

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

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. W. Bruinsma

January 5—“Jedidiah and the Elect Remnant”
II Kings 22:1, 2

January 12—“Mary Foresees Christ’s Death”
John 12:1-8

January 19—“Tabitha Raised from the Dead”
Acts 9:36-42

January 26—“God Opens Lydia’s Heart”
Acts 16:13-15