

The Standard Bearer

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Reaction to the Baby of Bethlehem

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Luke 2:17-20

An angel appeared to several shepherds outside of Bethlehem as they tended their flocks by night. He had glad tidings of great joy. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." And there was a sign. They would find this babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. In response to this news there was suddenly a multitude of angels praising God and saying, "Glory

to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

In the passage we use for this meditation we learn of the reaction of the shepherds, of Mary, and of the citizens of Bethlehem to the appearance of the angels and their message. There was a positive and a negative reaction. The reaction of the shepherds and Mary was positive. It was the reaction of faith. The reaction of the citizens of Bethlehem was negative. Theirs was the reaction of unbelief.

May our reaction be that of the shepherds and of Mary.

A twofold reaction

There was a positive reaction on the part of Mary and the shepherds.

Mention is made of all that the shepherds had heard and seen. They had heard and seen things that Mary had not. They had seen an angel and had heard his message, which was good tidings of great joy. The Savior had been born in Bethlehem. The angel had even given them a sign. And then a host of angels had filled the heavens glorifying God.

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

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Editorial Office

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
dykstra@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave
Hudsonville, MI 49426
benjwig@juno.com

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@
hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
Apartment 10, Block D
Ballycummin Village
Limerick, Ireland

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Although Mary had not seen and heard the angels, the shepherds most certainly told her about them.

The shepherds came with haste and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. The shepherd's haste speaks of excitement, joy, and urgency. Certainly the shepherds told Mary and Joseph all that they had seen and heard.

What the shepherds told Mary was only the culmination of other things she had seen and heard that the shepherds had not. There had been the appearance of the angel Gabriel announcing that she would give birth to the Christ-child as a virgin. There was the prophecy of John from his mother's womb, when Mary had gone to visit Elisabeth. The babe had blessed Mary and the fruit of her womb. And then there was the appearance of the angel to Joseph instructing him not to put Mary away but to take her as his wife.

And what was their reaction to all these things?

Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. That means she remembered them and reflected on them repeatedly. How precious these things were to her.

The shepherds did this and more. They made known abroad the saying that was told them. The emphasis here is not on the angels that appeared to them but on what they said. Eagerly and joyfully the shepherds published abroad what the angels had told them—the birth of the Savior, the sign of the manger, and the message of peace. And then they returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

But the people who heard the shepherds wondered. This does not mean that they had doubts about what the shepherds said. The shepherds were honest men. Their report had come on the heels of other unusual things. Just a little over a year before this, the aged priest Zacharias had emerged from the temple deaf and dumb, and the people discerned that he had received a revelation of the Lord after 400 years of silence. And then nine months later the aged Zacharias and Elisabeth gave birth to a child. Unusual things were happening. There was no need to doubt the report of these excited shepherds.

That the citizens of Bethlehem wondered means

rather that they were amazed. They marveled and were filled with awe at the report of the shepherds.

But the striking thing is that this wonder did not move them to go see the baby. You might expect the stable to be filled with visitors. Yet we read of none. And when only months later wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, just several miles away from Bethlehem, asking where he is that is born King of the Jews, no one knew.

This wonder of Bethlehem's citizens stands in sharp contrast to the reaction of the shepherds and Mary. Obviously Bethlehem's citizens did not keep these things and ponder them in their hearts. Neither did they glorify and praise God.

A proper explanation

The reaction of Bethlehem was the reaction of unbelief.

The nation of Israel was apostate, characterized by unbelief. And this unbelief determined the expectation of the people. They looked for earthly power and wealth. They were under the oppressive rule of Rome. They longed to throw off Roman rule and return to the glory days of David and Solomon. This they expected to have through the Savior God had promised. Understand well, this is not what God had promised in the Old Testament. He had promised a heavenly and spiritual Savior, who would establish a heavenly kingdom through the payment of sin. Yet in unbelief the people had blindly misinterpreted God's promise. This is characteristic of unbelief. The unbeliever believes what he wants rather than what God tells him. And this is what apostate Israel did so that she looked for an earthly Messiah from the hand of the Lord.

This explains the reaction of the people to the shepherd's report. The babe whom the angels announced to be the Christ was born in the lowliest of circumstances. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and was to be found in a manger. This offended the apostate citizenship of Bethlehem. What could possible come of such a baby? Their Savior must arise out of better circumstances. And so they marvel for a time. But they quickly put it out of their mind.

In contrast, the reaction of Mary and the shepherds was that of faith.

They were part of a small remnant that included Zacharias and Elisabeth, Simeon and Anna. In faith they looked for a spiritual kingdom in which they could enjoy reconciliation with God in the way of the payment of sin.

The lowly stable was no offense to them, but was in keeping with their hope. The angel had cited the lowly circumstances of Jesus' birth as a sign. It was a sign of a greater poverty, the poverty of our sin and guilt into which Jesus came at His birth—not His own sin and guilt but that of those whom the Father had given Him. This was the only way to establish the kingdom. It is doubtful that Mary and the shepherds fully understood the meaning of this sign. Yet it did not contradict their vision of reconciliation with and life with God in a heavenly kingdom.

And so in faith they embraced the babe of Bethlehem.

A solemn calling

The gospel that was proclaimed to the shepherds by the angels is still being proclaimed today, only more fully. Essentially the whole gospel of salvation was pro-

claimed to the shepherds that night. Unto you a savior is born who is Christ the Lord. A sign of His work is a manger. He will bring peace on earth. But the gospel of Jesus' birth is much fuller now. No, we do not see the angels or the manger. But we see the cross, the resurrection, the exaltation, and the return in judgment. This is the gospel of Christ's birth.

Our calling is to receive it, as did Mary and the shepherds. Most today are like the citizens of Bethlehem. They hear the gospel of Christ's birth. They may even wonder for a time. But the Christ-child and the salvation He brings are soon forgotten. That is true even in the Christmas season, when the vast majority focus on the secular rather than on the sacred. This is explained by unbelief that does not seek the salvation of God in Jesus Christ.

Let us by faith seek the wonderful salvation of God that He graciously provides in His Son, Jesus Christ. In that same faith let us keep all these things and ponder them in our hearts. Let us rejoice and glorify God. And let us noise abroad the glad tidings of great joy as did the shepherds. 

No Merely Formal Ties (Concluded)

Since the church of Jesus Christ is one, the Reformed church in this world is under obligation—sacred duty—to manifest the unity of the body of Christ insofar as this is possible. True uni-

ty leads to the formation of denominations or, where distance precludes federational unity, the establishment of ecclesiastical relationships such as a sister-church relationship.

That manifest unity of the church must not be merely a unity on paper. A body consists of members that care for and serve the body. Churches that federate as well as churches that form ecclesiastical relationships must seek to serve

the body of Christ. Accordingly, the PRC's commitment is that "no merely formal ties shall be established, but only such relationships as will serve the actual welfare of the churches involved and the manifestations of our unity in the Reformed faith" (Constitution, Committee for Contact with Other Churches).

This second editorial on ecclesiastical ties deals with some practical implications of a sister-church

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2012, p. 101.

relationship and offers suggestions to ensure that a relationship is “no merely formal tie” but rather a living, fruitful, beneficial tie that pleases the Head of the church.

Manifesting Unity

First and foremost, because unity is in Christ, the churches must never tire of strengthening their unity in the truth. Sister churches are not content simply to acknowledge that both adhere officially to the Reformed confessions, so that only those doctrines explicitly defined and defended in the confessions are our basis of unity. Sister churches also desire unity on doctrines that have arisen and been developed in the four centuries since the Reformed confessions were written. I refer to such doctrines as eschatology, grace, the covenant of grace, and the covenant with Adam. Sister churches are interested in exploring the unity they have in Christ through conferences, papers, speeches, and the like. The goal is not to impose one’s views on the other. The goal is the strongest unity possible, so that both may better explain, proclaim, and defend the truth of God, in their respective countries and cultures.

Essential for the preservation of the existing unity is the proper instruction of the children, the future generation. John Calvin made a point of that in 1545 in a dedicatory letter to “the faithful ministers of Christ throughout East Friesland.” Calvin dedicated the catechism, written for the instruction of the youth in Geneva, to these pastors in East Friesland because they had

requested such a catechism for their churches. After expressing his hearty appreciation for manifestations of church unity,¹ Calvin explained the importance of mutually agreed upon catechisms for the instruction of the youth.

For therein will appear, not only what one man or other once taught, but with what rudiments learned and unlearned alike amongst us, were constantly imbued from childhood, all the faithful holding them as their formal symbol of Christian communion.

Isn’t that obvious? When sister churches teach the children the same catechism material (though again, in their respective countries and cultures), they are building unity for the next generation. Writes Calvin, “This was indeed my principal reason for publishing this Catechism.” In today’s world, sister churches can assist each other with supplying and improving good sound catechetical material for the covenant seed.

Unity in sister-church relations will be evident also in their respective worship services. They will strive for unity as they learn from each other. The necessary elements of the Regulative Principle must be present, with

¹ Calvin wrote: “First, In this confused and divided state of Christendom, I judge it useful that there should be public testimonies, whereby churches which, though widely separated by space, agree in the doctrine of Christ, may mutually recognise each other. For besides that this tends not a little to mutual confirmation, what is more to be desired than that mutual congratulations should pass between them, and that they should devoutly commend each other to the Lord?” *Tracts and Treatises*, Henry Beveridge, translator, vol. 2, p. 34.

liberty for differences. The centrality of the Word (both read and preached), prayer, Psalm singing, offerings for the poor and kingdom causes, reverence in worship—these are essential. Sister churches need not have uniformity in liturgy, but they do appreciate the blessing of their members going to worship in a sister congregation and feeling quite at home, able to worship God with the saints there. From the present form of the liturgy of CERC, it is evident that CERC has come to appreciate both the liturgy and the liturgical forms of the PRC. I note also that one Protestant Reformed congregation (Grace), after its minister returned from a preaching visit to CERC, adopted a change in manner of speaking the “Salutation and Votum.”² One of the grounds (though certainly not the main one) for the change was that it was being done this way by “our sister church.” Sound, Reformed liturgical development and unity in the worship services are significant benefits for sister churches.

Mutual Oversight

In the previous editorial we indicated the essentiality of congregations within a denomination exercising mutual oversight in the classical meetings and church visitation. A modified form of that can be most beneficial for *sister* churches. In the PRC’s relation with the Covenant PRC NI, a modified form of church

² In CERC, the minister speaks the salutation: “Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ.” The congregation speaks in unison the votum: “Our help is in the name of Jehovah who has made the heavens and the earth.”

visitation is conducted yearly. Two officebearers of the PRC visit with the session of Covenant and conduct the same kind of visit that is done in all the churches in the PRC. This helps protect the elders and deacons of Covenant from the perils of independentism, especially hierarchy.

But that is only the beginning of the benefit. Covenant PRC NI has learned to draw out as much fellowship and unifying activity as possible during the visit of the delegation. In the space of about two weeks, they schedule their congregational dinner, which the delegation from the PRC attend, and sponsor at least one public speech given by the Protestant Reformed minister. In addition, they ask the minister to preach four times, make appropriate pastoral visits to homes of members of CPRC NI, and lead a Bible study. Thus, yearly, face-to-face meetings are held to discuss problems, joys, sorrows, the truth, the battle of faith—in short, whatever needs to be discussed. Issues can be dealt with, advice sought, and suggestions made for improving the relationship. I tell you, this is a blessing for Covenant PRC NI. It is also a tremendous blessing to the minister and elder delegation from the PRC—which they are obligated to “bring back” as much as possible—at the very least, a good report of the faithfulness and steadfastness of the saints in CPRC NI.

With joy I can report that Covenant ERC has requested a similar arrangement to be followed with the Contact Committee. The CC is delighted at this indication that

CERC wants a close and living relationship, not a merely formal tie. Congregations in the PRC do well to remember these incalculable benefits when their pastors are released to serve as delegates on these visits.

Along that same line, a sister congregation standing alone can obtain help in matters of discipline. Reformed church polity places checks on the authority of the consistory in the vital matter of church discipline. The consistory must obtain permission from the classis before proceeding to the second step of discipline, and those under discipline have the right to appeal the consistory’s decisions. A procedure has been developed to assist a sister church involved in discipline—a means of getting advice before proceeding to excommunication, and a process of appeal. (Confer the Acts of Synod 1999, Art. 68 for the arrangement, confirmed in 2007, Acts, Art. 16.)

Yet, mutual supervision ought not be all one way. A smaller sister can exercise some mutual supervision by reading carefully the minutes of the major ecclesiastical gathering. Even better, they ought to *send* a delegate yearly to the major assembly. It is no insignificant matter to have delegates from our sister churches in Northern Ireland and Singapore attend a synod of the PRC. These officebearers are seated as delegates and have the right to speak on any issue that arises at synod. The more this occurs, the freer the foreign delegates will be to speak, and the more the PRC will benefit from the perspective of faithful men from sister congregations.

Something More?

All official relationships call for the sister churches to keep each other informed of their decisions as well as to exchange denominational yearbooks and or church directories. It calls for “correspondence, committee visits, and conferences to confirm and strengthen our unity in Christ.” All this will be done by the Contact Committee.

And yet, will the relationship between CERC and the PRC be more than a merely formal tie for the *members* of CERC and the *members* of the PRC? It may seem a distant and merely formal relationship for many. But one simple thing that transforms it from a merely formal tie to a living relationship is personal contact between the saints of the two ecclesiastical bodies.

Talk to members of the PRC who have been to the British Reformed Conference and who have fellowshiped and then worshiped with the saints in Ballymena or in Limerick. They worshiped, talked theology and life together, and saw how these saints in Ireland stood as a faithful witness to the Reformed faith in their land and culture. For these members of the PRC, our relationship with CPRC NI is no merely formal tie. It lives. Such visitors have returned home with a great appreciation for the work done, and a love for the church and their emerald isle.

Perhaps you cannot make such a trip to Ireland. You are not thereby totally excluded from such a blessed experience. The experience of the handful of PRC members who hosted Singaporeans in their homes for a few days was similar. They fell

in love with these saints. For them, CERC is real.

More is possible. Members of the PRC take vacations. Some in northern climes enjoy a couple weeks of relief from winter's cold blast—the warmth of Mexico, Florida, or some Caribbean island. Rethink that. You want warmth, beauty, and delicious food? Save a bit longer and visit Singapore. The warmth and beauty that will linger in your mind and soul is the Christian fellowship with the saints in CERC—unspeakably better than a resort in Jamaica or Cancun. If you were to join CERC for their Bible camp in June, the accommodations will be most reasonable, the speeches edifying, and the fellowship like nothing you have ever

experienced. (Readers are reminded that the focus of the editorials is on the newly established relationship between the PRC and CERC. A visit to Ireland or Australia will yield the same benefits, to be sure.)

But there are still more possibilities. When the saints visit from Ireland, or Singapore, or equally as much from the EPC of Australia, seize any opportunity to have them stay in your home. Come to synod as you have opportunity and meet the men delegated by sister churches. A number of our congregations have had opportunity in recent times to host seminary students from these churches. Those who have taken the opportunity to get acquainted with these saints have benefited themselves and their children. Do that,

and the official church relationships will never be a mere formal tie for you and your family.

I offer these suggestions for making the official relationships live for the members. One editorial does not exhaust the possibilities. I have no doubt that the resourceful *SB* readership will think of more.

May God bless all the efforts to manifest the true unity of the body of Christ. May God use *meaningful* ecclesiastical relationships for the glory of His name, the defense of the truth, and the blessing of His one, holy, catholic church. What a glorious day it will be when distance, culture, and language no longer separate believers, and we will experience the reality of that one church of Jesus Christ! 

LETTERS

Exclusive Psalmody

May I comment on Rev. Cory Griess' article on psalm-singing (*SB*, October 15, 2012). First of all, I commend Rev. Griess for the article, together with the recent articles in his rubric "O Come Let Us Worship." I have found them both thought-provoking and profitable.

That said, I believe Rev. Griess' good principles on biblical worship are fatally weakened by his claim that "It [the Synod of Dordt] did not advocate the notion that the regulative principle demanded exclusive psalmody" (p. 33). I do not see how we can maintain psalm-singing in our churches without holding to exclusive psalmody. Is not exclusive psalmody like a great dike, as in the sea coast of the Netherlands, holding back the flood of corruption that would engulf the pure worship of God?

That the songs recorded in the New Testament (for example, the Song of Mary) are not mandated for corporate worship is evident from the simple fact they are not included in the inspired songbook of God's church. In the Psalter, God has given us His own divine songbook!

It is not for us to add to it or take away from it. God commands us to sing the psalms: "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him..." (Ps. 105:2). The Old Testament church sang the psalms exclusively. The "hymn" that Jesus and His disciples sang (Matt. 26:30) after the paschal supper refers to the Hallel psalms (Psalms 113-118), which were customarily sung on the night of the supper. Thus our Lord Himself sang from the inspired book of praises.

Furthermore, in the same breath and immediately following Rev. Griess' assertion that Dordt did not advocate exclusive psalmody, he states: "Dordt did understand that the principle of *sola scriptura*...had to be maintained, as much as possible in worship too, for the life and health of the church" (p. 33). My problem here is with the phrase "as much as possible." If the principle of *sola scriptura* in worship is going to be maintained "as much as possible," then I fear we will not maintain it at all! *Sola scriptura* must be maintained not "as much as possible," but "at all costs"!

Sincerely,
Philip Rainey

Response:

I thank Mr. Rainey for reading my article “The Secession of 1857: A Return to Psalm-Singing,” and for taking the time to respond in writing. I appreciate, too, the brother’s desire to maintain the pure worship of God in Christ’s church.

Brother Rainey has concerns about a few statements I made in the article. First of all, the brother says, “I believe Rev. Griess’ good principles on biblical worship are fatally weakened by his claim that ‘It [the Synod of Dordt] did not advocate the notion that the regulative principle demanded exclusive psalmody’ (p. 33). I do not see how we can maintain psalm-singing in our churches without holding to exclusive psalmody.”

In this instance the brother has an argument with the Synod of Dordt and not with me. The historical fact is that the Synod of Dordt did not mandate exclusive Psalmody. That is seen in that the church order produced at the Synod of Dordt allowed for the singing of a few hymns.¹ Hardly could the synod have made that allowance if she were convinced that the Regulative Principle of worship required exclusive Psalm-singing.

If the brother disagrees with the Synod of Dordt on that, and disagrees with the Protestant Reformed Churches on that (the Church Order of the PRC reflects Dordt’s view, see Article 69), he is free to do so in the proper way. But the historical facts are what they are and are indisputable.

Historically, though the Dutch Reformed did not teach that the Regulative Principle demands exclusive psalmody, they did desire to maintain the singing of Psalms. This too is reflected in the Church Order of Dordt, which calls for *near* exclusive Psalm-singing. There are many good reasons for singing the Psalms in worship. Abraham Kuiper, in his book of worship in the Dutch Reformed churches, gives six reasons: 1. Scripture presents us with an inspired songbook, which is the book of Psalms. 2. The Psalms have spiritual depth that exceeds that of man-made hymns. 3. Hymns seem to push the singing of Psalms out of the church historically. 4. The psalms transcend time and culture, whereas hymns are often popular only

¹ See VanDellen and Monsma *Church Order Commentary*, p. 283, if there is doubt about this.

for a time. 5. The singing of hymns historically led to the singing of choirs in the services. 6. Historically the more pious members of the church desire to sing the Psalms, the less pious the hymns.² The PRC have for these same reasons continued to maintain Psalm-singing in spite of the fact that, following Dordt, they do not teach that the Regulative Principle demands exclusive Psalmody.

The second statement concerning which Brother Rainey expresses concern is the statement I made that “Dordt did understand that the principle of *sola scriptura*...had to be maintained, as much as possible in worship too, for the life and health of the church” (p. 33). The brother states his concern: “My problem here is with the phrase ‘as much as possible.’ If the principle of *sola scriptura* in worship is going to be maintained ‘as much as possible,’ then I fear we will not maintain it at all! *Sola scriptura* must be maintained not ‘as much as possible,’ but ‘at all costs!’”

The statement that Dordt “understood that *sola scriptura* must be maintained in worship too as much as possible” refers to *sola scriptura* with regard to the *content of worship*; Scripture alone taking up the *content* of the elements of worship demanded by God’s Word. The reason why I say that the Synod of Dordt understood that the principle of *sola scriptura* had to be maintained in worship too *as much as possible* is because there is some disagreement on how to apply that principle to the content of the elements of worship. While it is quite possible to *sing* only Scripture, it is not very possible to *pray* only Scripture. I don’t think Mr. Rainey would desire that all congregational prayers be simply the reading of Scripture passages. Does that mean he is not in favor of the principle of *sola scriptura* in worship? Is it sufficient, in the maintaining of the principle of *sola scriptura*, to say that prayer is built upon the principles of Scripture, that the promises of Scripture are prayed, and that prayer generally follows the pattern set out in Scripture? Similar questions do arise with respect to singing. Must the Psalms be sung in *literal translation* in order for the principle of *sola scriptura* to be maintained, or may they be sung as versified in our Psalter?

Though Dordt desired, and the PRC still desire,

² Abraham Kuiper, *Our Worship*, p. 39.

to maintain Psalm-singing as their respective church orders declare, is singing songs that are versifications of other parts of Scripture denying the principle of *sola scriptura* in worship? Is the fact that Dordt allowed some songs that are not versifications of Scripture as such, but are built on the theology of Scripture, denying the principle of *sola scriptura*? These questions existed at the time of the Synod of Dordt, and they still exist today, even within the Protestant Reformed Churches.

If one were to take *sola scriptura* in the content of worship to mean literal quotations of Scripture in every element of worship, then Dordt would respond by saying we want to maintain that principle *as much*

as possible, but we recognize that in some cases it is not possible (congregational prayer). If one were to take a less rigid view of *sola scriptura* with regard to the content of the elements of worship, then perhaps the statement I made could be amended by dropping the words 'as much as possible,' and saying simply that Dordt wanted to maintain *sola scriptura* in worship.

Again, at the end of the day, I don't think the brother's issue is with me, but rather with the Synod of Dordt and the PRC church order. The brother is free to have that issue, and to express it in the proper way as he did in his letter.

Rev. Griess 

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

Sandy: God's Destroyer

The eastern half of the United States was smitten a few weeks ago by a fierce storm from the hand of God. She is called Sandy, an ironic name for such a terrible storm. The storm named Sandy, defender of men, was the destroyer of men. She destroyed over one hundred lives and billions of dollars in property. She destroyed land, fields, houses, cars, businesses, boats, and buildings. She was a destroyer from God.

To the unbeliever the statement that such an event is from God is absurd and offensive. Believing it to be absurd, the unbelieving press, unbelieving commentators, and unbelievers in general mock the statement that Sandy was from God. When the unbeliever mocks, he also brings up the so-called problem of evil, that is, if God is good, how can He control evil? This question in the mouth of the wicked is unbelief. That it is unbelief is clear from their answer to the question. If they do not deny God altogether, they assert that God had nothing to do with such evil—He was not in the storm—and ascribe her to mere natural causes. To unbelief God is not sovereign over evil.

This reaction of modern, sophisticated, intellectual society is nothing new; it is the reappearance of the

old, false doctrine of dualism, which is the teaching that two sovereign forces, good and evil, are at war with one another in the world. God is in control of good, and Satan is in control of evil. The outcome of these battling forces is always in doubt.

Denial of God's sovereignty over evil, such as Sandy, is dualism. This means that evil is a sovereign power or principle outside of God that He does not control and that is contrary to His good and wise plan for all things. His plan is the glory of Jesus Christ in the salvation of the elect church for God's own glory. Dualism would have us believe that the devil, his demons, wicked men, and all evil forces are sovereign and that God is not sovereign. The confession of God as *God* is at stake here.

Right along with dualism's denial of God's sovereignty over the storm is the teaching of Arminian universalism that God loves all men without exception and its denial that there was any judgment of God in Sandy. Mark Galli wrote in *Christianity Today*,

As usual, great weather events bring out the Christian crazies, like those proclaiming that Hurricane Sandy is God's judgment...against (pick one) homosexuals, pornography, materialism, secularism, Darwinism, and so on and so forth. But I'm not linking to these statements because, well, you've got better things to do with your time than read sub-Christian, one might even say non-Christian, theology.

Rev. Langerak is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

Rather than recognizing God's judgment, Galli wants his readers to think that "no one need be afraid, because God will rescue one and all." What "seems horrible, destructive, and pointless is embraced by the holiness of God and redeemed by the cross." Galli also incongruously refers to "Jesus *stilling the storm*" as teaching that "a different calculus is at work" in the New Testament as over against the Old Testament when "storms...are often seen as God's act of judgment."¹

His message is unmistakable: God loves everyone; Christ's cross redeemed everybody; Sandy is threatening to no one.

Attempting to make sense of Sandy, James White, professor of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, wrote that "God [is] longing to hold us" and "he gave [the choice] to each one of us," so that "we might use our free-will and choose again" to love God after we in Adam "radically altered" God's original plan. White speaks disparagingly of those who say that Sandy is "just another example of the sovereignty of God."²

The deist, too, denies God's sovereignty over evil. Deism is the Enlightenment philosophy that God made everything and runs it by certain fixed laws. Deism denies that God's providence controls fruitful and barren years, sickness and health, storm and no storm. Deism appears in its modern form when evil occurrences are ascribed merely to natural causes. Storms are ascribed merely to climate change or nature.

In their opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, Gernot Wagner and Martin Weitzman, climate-change author and economist from the University of Harvard, asked whether or not Sandy was "the fat-tail of climate change." Fat-tails are statistical oddities—bizarre events—that do not fit with accepted ways of thinking and about which the standard models can make no sense. The authors' conclusion is typical: "It seems that climate change may have made things worse."³

Equally emphatically the naysayers chimed in. E. Calvin Beisner wrote an article in *World* in which he quoted various scientists to refute the climate-change

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/october-web-only/what-jesus-might-say-about-sandy/>.

² <http://www.religiontoday.com/columnists/dr-james-emery-white/god-and-sandy.html/>.

³ <http://blogs.wsj.com/ideas-market/2012/11/01/was-hurricane-sandy-the-fat-tail-of-climate-change/>.

theory, but he said nothing about God's hand in the storm:

To call Sandy a harbinger of a "new normal," in which unprecedented weather events cause unprecedented destruction, would be wrong. This historic storm should remind us that planet Earth is a dangerous place, where extreme events are commonplace and disasters are to be expected.⁴

Most news reports referred to "nature" as the cause of the storm. President Obama agnostically referred to being "shocked by the force of mother nature."⁵

Whether or not climate change was involved in the historic storm Sandy is immaterial for the truth of God's sovereignty and evil. The crucial question is, was God active in that huge storm as she slammed into the eastern coast of the United States? A denial of God's activity in and control of the storm and ascribing her merely to natural causes is deism.

Over against the world's scoffing, the outright denial of, or the agnostic silence about, God's sovereignty by the false and apostatizing church, the Reformed faith says, "Sandy was God's hand." The Reformed faith confesses God's sovereignty over evil. The rock bottom, basic confession of the church in the face of evil—all evil—is that God is good and God is sovereign. The so-called problem of evil starts wrongly with *if*: "If God is good..." The confession of the believer starts with the assertion, "God is good; His will is only good; this good God in His good will is sovereign over evil."

By the sovereignty of God, including evil, we mean that God decreed all things and that He providentially controls their occurrence. The Reformed creeds teach this and also reject both dualism's and deism's understandings of evil in relationship to God. Article 13 of the Belgic Confession rejects dualism: "nothing happens in this world without His appointment...for His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner." The same article says regarding deism, "We reject that damnable error of the Epicureans,

⁴ http://www.worldmag.com/2012/11/is_superstorm_sandy_a_harbinger_of_the_new_normal/.

⁵ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/max-lucado-where-was-god-when-hurricane-sandy-hit-84204/>.

who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.” The Reformed faith rejects the error that God regards nothing in His creation, and this means the teaching, too, that He leaves everything to run by fixed laws. The Reformed faith says that, regardless of whether Sandy was the fat-tail of climate change, she was the hand of God beating upon the eastern coast of the United States. And Jesus Christ, who has ascended on high in might to reign and who holds and opens the book with seven seals, was in control of God’s hand. Jesus did not say to Sandy, “Peace, be still.” He told her, as a powerful part of His hosts, to go, how far to go, and to the places He directed.

The destructive storm—evil—is not outside of God’s decree or of His providential government of the world, but is included in it. This was true of the fall of Adam. Contrary to James White, the fall of Adam did not “radically alter” God’s plan for human beings, but was included in God’s plan. This being true of the fall, it was also true of the cross (Acts 4:28). Being true of the fall and of the cross, it is also true of every evil event in this world.

This teaching does not at all mitigate the truth that sin and the subsequent misery that fell upon the whole human race and the entire creation is man’s fault, and that terrible storms are the evidence of a groaning creation subjected to the curse (Rom. 8:22). But it teaches that God controls all things, including evil events, for His purpose, at the heart of which stands His covenant, Jesus Christ, and the eternal blessedness of His church in a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. All things—evil as well as good—must serve His purpose.

We are not at a loss to know the purpose of God in Sandy.

She was judgment.

Mark Galli, to his credit, is better than some when he says that God “was in the storm” and speaks about those who are “anxious to distance God” from the storm and from any natural weather patterns. But that a professing Christian would say that Sandy was not judgment indicates that he does not know the Scriptures,

which say: “Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done *it*” (Amos 3:6)? About all the evil of the Assyrian horde that descended upon Judah God said, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation,” against a “hypocritical nation” (Is. 10:5, 6). And this is not merely an Old Testament phenomenon. The book of Revelation speaks loudly of God’s judgments. God is sovereign over evil events; He decrees them and providentially controls their carrying out for judgment. The problem of many with God’s sovereignty over evil is not due to a lack in Scripture’s clarity about this truth.

Whether or not Sandy was the “fat-tail” of climate change is open to debate, but that it is the “fat-tail” of an

Arminian theology of the universal love of God is clear. That theology simply cannot make sense of and has nothing sensible to say about Sandy. It ought to be clear to everyone that what happened on the eastern coast was not what happened on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus Christ did not say to Sandy, “Peace, be still.” Still more, if God loves all and desires to “hold” everyone again, then in light of all

the human suffering caused by Sandy, she is less like an urgent plea and more akin to the temper tantrum of a spurned suitor.

Rather, the Belgic Confession teaches us of God’s “righteous judgments” in His government of the world. God’s judgments on wickedness are not always visible. Often the wicked prosper and are at ease in the world. But when we do see God’s righteous judgments, in the language of Calvin, it “affords us a refreshing display of his justice.”⁶

Note that: “refreshing”!

That a professing Christian would be squeamish or offended about speaking of God’s judgment on wickedness such as “homosexual[ity], pornography, materialism, secularism, Darwinism,” as Galli is, indicates that he either does not regard these things as wickedness or that he has so eviscerated the justice of God by a

*Jesus did not
say to Sandy,
“Peace, be still.”*

⁶ John Calvin, commenting on Psalm 37:12 in his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

false doctrine of God's universal love that nothing of it remains.

On the contrary, for the Reformed Christian such a storm as Sandy refreshes. She is a clear and comforting reminder that our God sits in the heavens. The believer has no difficulty with God's judgments upon the wicked in this life, because he knows the justice and severity of God; he knows that God loves only His elect, not all men; he knows God's hatred of sin; and he knows the truth of eternal punishment.

Sandy was refreshing to the people of God who see all around them the abounding lawlessness of society and read in the papers about the triumph of wickedness. For example, recently *U.S. News* columnist Miranda Leitsinger wrote in an article entitled "Gay Rights Movement Ends Dismal Record" about the "red letter day" for the homosexual movement.

It was among the worst performances in American political history, and yesterday it came to a screeching halt. Supporters of same-sex marriage had lost 30 statewide votes on the issue...before Tuesday's victories in Minnesota, Maryland and Maine.... "I would expect that when people are writing [high school civics books] 50 years from now...Nov. 6, 2012 will be listed as a red letter day for the gay rights movement," said Michael Klarman, a Harvard Law School professor and author of "From the Closet to the Altar...." "I think it will be seen as the date that marriage equality turned an important corner," he added.... The big day for gay rights advocates went beyond the four states holding ballot initiatives: In Wisconsin...Tammy Baldwin defeated her Republican opponent...to become the first openly gay member of the U.S. Senate. The replacement for her House seat is also gay. "I think this is a sea-change moment...the real mainstreaming of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender people..." said Bishop Gene Robinson...the Episcopal church's first openly gay bishop.⁷

Evil is not limited to the victories of sexual perversion at the ballot box, but it is a powerful evidence of the spirit of the times in which the church lives. It is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-church, as it always has been. The prominence and successes of the movement

⁷ <http://usnews.nbcnews.com/news/2012/11/07/14998618-1-for-31-no-more-gay-rights-movement>.

demonstrate that the spirit of antichrist moves powerfully in the world and will soon culminate in his coming and his kingdom. Besides, the prominence of the homosexual movement, as well as its general acceptance within society, is itself an evidence of the judgment of God upon man, according to Romans 1:26–27:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

This evil, too, is under the sovereign control of God. When He is finished with it, He will wipe it off the earth like a flood.

There was also a pointed word from Christ in Sandy, as He also spoke regarding reports of calamity during His ministry and the thinking of reporters that those who perished were sinners above all: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1–5).

While insisting that the storm was judgment, the believer likewise insists that for the people and church of God—the elect and them only—whatever evil comes upon the world is for the good of His church. In the language of *Psalter 20*: "The children of men He beholds from on high, the wicked to punish, the righteous to try." In the lovely words of Article 13 of the Belgic Confession: "This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of the most gracious and heavenly Father, who watches over us with a paternal care that not a hair of our head...can fall to the ground without the will of our Father."

The storm was also an indication of what is coming. Christ spoke loudly in Sandy that He is personally coming with a swift and terrifying judgment to shake the heavens and the earth and to make all things new. The storm for all its power was just heavy breathing in comparison to what will be happening in the world when the wicked say, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16, 17).

Sandy belongs to what Reformed theology calls precursory signs. These signs in society, nature, and the church clearly indicate that Christ is coming. The signs belong to the coming of Christ; in them Christ comes constantly throughout New Testament history. Christ strode up and down the eastern coast a few weeks ago. Those signs are also clear and unmistakable indications

of Christ's personal, visible, and bodily coming at the end of this age to conduct the final judgment.

As a sign Sandy made us lift up our heads, because our redemption draws nigh. And she taught us again to labor "while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). 

Death, the Grave, and Hell

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 16

Question 40. Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?

Answer. Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for sins could be made no otherwise than by the death of the Son of God.

Question 41. Why was He also "buried"?

Answer. Thereby to prove that He was really dead.

Question 42. Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?

Answer. Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.

Question 43. What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?

Answer. That by virtue thereof our old man is crucified, dead, and buried with Him; that so the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us; but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Question 44. Why is there added, "He descended into hell"?

Answer. That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.

T rue to its form, the Catechism continues its theme of personal comfort. We come now to the rather morbid subjects of death, the grave, and hell, and the Catechism again gives comfort. Perhaps there is no place that comfort is so needed, or experienced so richly, as when we stand at the grave, or

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington.

lie on our deathbed. This Lord's Day speaks, in a very beautiful way, to the dying and grieving believer.

The Savior's Death and Burial

If, in the suffering of the cross, especially in the three hours of darkness, Christ made full atonement for sin, so that He could say "It is finished," then why did He continue to suffer beyond this. Why did He have to die and be buried?

The answer to that question shows that in all His suffering He took our place. Just as in His crucifixion He was bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, so in His death and burial He “lays down His life” for us. Beyond the payment for our sins, Christ suffered death and the grave to conquer these enemies for us too. In His death, He entered into the fullness of the consequences of our sin, for “the wages of sin is death.” In His burial we see, not only that He was truly dead, but that He enters into the full reality of our suffering, the great and last enemy, which is death. How many of us have not experienced the bitterness and the power of the grave, standing there to bury a loved one? From an earthly and material point of view, this is it. There is no reversal, no turning back the clock. The earthly ties are broken. The grave, it seems, has won.

But Jesus was buried to overcome every aspect of death, including the grave. When He was buried, “his flesh did not see corruption,” and it was not possible for death to hold Him (Acts 2:24, 31). This, because He had “loosed the pains of death” (Acts 2:24). By paying the price of sin, He removed the power and penalty of death. He did not fear death, but entered there to set all His own free.

Our Death and Burial

But why, then, do we still die? If Christ’s death paid the full penalty price for our sins, and if He entered the grave itself as the victor for us, then why has every New Testament Christian who is in heaven today had to die to get there?

For two reasons.

One, because death for the believer is an entrance into eternal life. Death is not an enemy, but a servant. We should not fear death, but greet it with joy and confidence, the joy of entering into the presence of Christ. Death is the doorway to our heavenly home. It is the gate to the New Jerusalem. “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave,

where is thy victory?” (I Cor. 15:54, 55). Our death is the answer to Christ’s prayer, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (John 17:24). Death is gain, the great gain of being with Christ (Phil. 1:21, 23).

The other reason we must die is to put an end to our earthly struggle, to abolish sin. Oh, to be freed from the body of this death and the daily struggles with the sinful desires of the flesh! This is the believer’s prayer, every day, when he says, “Give me grace for another day. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one.” Our physical death is the final answer to that prayer, the final washing away of sin, the final cleansing act. What freedom comes to the souls of

believers at death: no more proud thoughts, no more sharp words, no more sinful desires, no more sin! Did you ever think of death that way? An end to a struggle, not now a struggle because of disease or poverty or a hard life, but an end to the struggle with sin!

Neither should the grave frighten us. Jesus says that dead believers are “not dead but sleeping” (Luke 8:52; cf.

also Job 7:21; Dan. 12:2; Acts 13:36; I Cor. 15:6; I Thess. 4:13). With this comparison, Jesus teaches us that the grave is not hopeless, but only a bed of rest. When we put our children to bed at night, we expect them to awake refreshed in the morning. In our graves we will be waiting to be awakened on that great day when Christ will come through the cemeteries of this earth and bid us wake up to a new morning and a new day. And so, burial is not the end, but only the sowing of a seed, from which a new plant will come. “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory: It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (I Cor. 15:42-44).

And do you know that all of this already begins within the believer on this side of the grave! Our Savior’s death was not only a payment for sin that assures us of heaven, but it also means that our sinful natures

*...burial is not the end,
but only the sowing of a seed,
from which a new plant
will come.*

have been put to death in this life. We are “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20) and “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:2). This does not mean that the fight with sin is finished, but rather that the fight for holiness can begin. Where Christ lives in a man, the power of sin is broken and the evil lusts of the flesh no longer hold sway, but that person is dedicated in gratitude to serve his Savior.

Descended into Hell

There is no phrase in the Apostles’ Creed that has caused so much confusion and controversy as this one, “He descended into hell.” The confusion comes from the words used (“descended into hell” seems to imply a literal descent into the place of eternal suffering), and from the placement of this phrase at the end of Christ’s suffering, after His death and burial.

To understand it properly, the main question is not, What was originally meant by this phrase? That question cannot be answered, because there is nothing that church historians have ever discovered that tells us what was originally intended. In fact, historians differ on when this was first included in the Apostles’ Creed, and even whether it belongs.

The main question also is not, How was it traditionally understood by the church through the ages? If we would go this route, we would probably have to drop it from the Creed, since the Roman Catholic interpretation, already in the Middle Ages, was that Christ descended to hell, the place of everlasting torment, for the few days between His death and resurrection. But Jesus told the thief on the cross that they would be together that very day in paradise (Luke 23:43). Besides, Jesus’ cries “It is finished” (John 19:30) and “Into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46) teach that He had no more suffering to endure in hell. And I Peter 4:6, which says that the gospel was “preached also to them that are dead” does not mean that someone went to them after they were dead and preached the gospel, but rather that those who are now dead, had the gospel preached to them while they were alive during the Old Testament (I Pet. 3:19-20; II Pet. 2:5).

So, how is it to be understood? Is it legitimate for us to confess that Christ “descended into hell”?

Some say that “hell” here refers to “hades” or the grave, that this phrase refers to nothing more than His

burial. But then it would be entirely redundant, for we have already confessed that He was buried.

The only way to understand Christ’s descent into hell is spiritually. Then we look at this last phrase on Christ’s suffering as the climax, or the expression of the most intense form of His suffering. He did not only suffer physically, but His suffering was the experience in His soul of the full weight of the wrath of God, equivalent to the torments of hell. Christ’s experience in the darkness of Calvary is expressed in His cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Surely, there is no suffering so deep, no hell so great, as what the Son of God Himself, as He endured the punishment of our sin, expresses in these words! God had turned His face from the Son of His love.

Because of this, we can have comfort in all the troubles and torments of life. Not only will we never have to experience a suffering like to His, but we can also have the confidence in our sufferings that God will never turn His face from us. Instead, we have a merciful and a sympathetic Savior who has delivered us from all hell, and is able to help us in every trouble that comes our way.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). 

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Jesus still have to die physically after He had made the payment for sin?
2. What is the significance of Jesus’ burial?
3. Describe the bitterness of death and the grave? Have you ever had to face this? What fears do you have concerning death?
4. How are the death and burial of Christ a comfort to Christians in the face of death?
5. In what ways is death a servant to believers?
6. What two beautiful illustrations does the Bible use to speak of the believer’s burial?
7. What does it mean that we are “crucified with Christ”?
8. When did Christ descend into hell? Did He actually go to the place, hell? Why/why not?
9. What comfort is there for us in knowing that Christ actually suffered the torments of hell?

Upon This Rock (6)

Israel's Treacherous Sister

Perhaps you will recall that a year ago we started in this rubric what we hope to be a series of articles on the very beginning of New Testament Bible history. We began, however, with a quick review of the end of *Old Testament* history—not for its own sake but, as we said at that time, “for the perspective that the Old gives to the New. For it is out of the scattering of the people of Israel and the ruins of the house of David that there comes the glorious kingdom of David’s greater son.”

In five articles we focused on the demise of the Kingdom of Israel—that is, the Israel of the ten tribes, the northern kingdom. The last of the five concluded with this note: “Next time: Israel’s treacherous sister.” At long last we make good on that intention, focusing now on the end of the Kingdom of *Judah*, Israel’s treacherous sister, and, again, much from the perspective of the prophets. We turn first, as one might expect, to the prophet Jeremiah, who brought God’s word to Judah right to the bitter end.



“Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done?” the Lord asked the prophet Jeremiah. “She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not.”

Mr. Doezema is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2012, p. 208.

Then this: “And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also” (Jer. 3:6-8).

What were those “causes” that Judah had seen?

The northern kingdom, the kingdom of the ten tribes, had been *founded* in *apostasy*. Under Jeroboam I, Israel, in their rejection of the house of David and abandoning of the worship of God in Jerusalem’s temple, had in effect rejected *Christ*, both with respect to His kingly and His priestly office. And the golden calves at Dan and Bethel led to an addiction to *idolatry*—an addiction that, even in the face of repeated admonitions from prophets of the Lord, they steadfastly refused to abandon. On every high hill and under every green tree the people of Israel had prostituted themselves to *idols*.

And, like an unfaithful wife, she was *divorced*. God put her away. He cast her out of the land that He had promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their seed forever in the way of obedience. The Jews of the northern kingdom were scattered among the nations, never, as a people, to return.

That was what Israel’s sister Judah saw. And, instead of taking warning, she went and “played the harlot also.”

“And the Lord said unto me,” says Jeremiah, “the backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah” (Jer. 3:11). That is, backsliding Israel was not so bad as, was more righteous than, her sister Judah.

How is that so? Part of the reason is surely this, that Judah saw what Israel did, witnessed her ruin because of it, and did not take to heart the warning. Judah observed the demise of her sister “at a distance, as it were from a watchtower; yet she saw it without any advantage. ...she thought not of repenting, when she had such a striking example of vengeance set before her eyes” (Calvin).

Significantly, the prophet Ezekiel, a younger contemporary of Jeremiah (though himself already a captive in Babylon), compared the iniquity of Judah not only with that of her “elder sister” Samaria (Israel) but also with that of her “younger sister”...Sodom! And Judah was declared to be the worst of the lot. “They [thy two sisters] are more righteous than thou” (Ezek. 16:46-52).

“Son of man,” the Lord said to Ezekiel, “cause Jerusalem to know her abominations” (Ezek. 16:1, 2). Cause “Jerusalem” to know—that is, Jerusalem as she represents the *nation*, Judah, the Jews as a people. Cause *them*, the Lord says, to *know*.

But, we might ask, was there among them, the Jews, no *knowledge*? Indeed there was. The words of the apostle Paul come to mind. “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them was committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1, 2). Unlike their heathen neighbors, the Jews had the *Scriptures*. And they studied them. They had also the temple, the priesthood, and the throne of David—all in *Jerusalem*. Jerusalem was therefore a *place of knowledge*. But Jerusalem did not know her *sin*. Hence the word of the Lord to Ezekiel: “...cause Jerusalem to know her *abominations*.”

Hence also the word of the Lord to Jeremiah: “Stand in the gate of the Lord’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place” (Jer. 7:1-3).

But...why *here*? Why at the gate of the *temple*? Why to those who are coming to *worship the Lord*? Is this not like ‘preaching to the choir’?

Decidedly not. In fact, if it is permissible in this

instance to speak of levels of abominations, we could say that those who brought lambs to the temple in Jerusalem did worse than those who burned incense to Baal on high hills and under green trees.

It was *this* that Judah did not know. Truth is, they *thought* the opposite. Judah had “judged” her sisters (Ezek. 16:52) and smugly concluded that they (Sodom and Samaria) *deserved* what *they* got: fire and brimstone, for the one, and the punishing armies of the kings of Assyria, for the other. “But not *us*. The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are *we*” (Jer. 7:4).

And God gave *His* judgment: “*They* are more righteous than *thou*,...thou hast justified thy sisters” (Ezek. 16:52)—that is, *Sodom* and *Samaria*, thy sisters, seem almost *innocent*, when compared with *you*.

We might be inclined to respond with disbelief. The sin that represents one of the depths of human depravity came to be named, for good reason, after *Sodom*. And do we not remember the defiant words of the people of Israel, “What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David” (II Kings 12:16)? And did not Israel abandon the God-ordained worship of Jehovah, both with respect to place and manner? Did not Judah, in striking contrast, remain loyal, for 300 years, to the house of David, and maintain the worship of God in the house that He had chosen to put His name there, through priests of the house of Levi? Does all that count for *nothing*?

The Jews who still remained in Jerusalem at the time that Ezekiel spoke those words of prophecy from his exile in Babylon would have considered them absurd.

Likewise would the Jews of Jesus’ day consider His words of condemnation absurd, when He said to them, “But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matt. 11:24).

And, lest we forget, what about the church of today, far removed, in the twenty-first century A.D., from Israel, and Judah, and Sodom. It was, after all, not for nothing that the apostle Paul, in reflecting on this history of Old Testament Israel, had this to say: “All these things happened unto them for examples: and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends

of the world are come" (I Cor. 10:11). In truth, no less pointedly could the admonition of Ezekiel be directed to the church today: "Cause *Jerusalem* to know her sins!"

What then was the character of Judah's sins, especially when we compare them, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel did, to the sins of her two sisters? What comes to mind immediately, when comparing sins of the same *kind*, is the degree of *light*. Jesus made reference to that in His denunciation of Capernaum in the context of the verse (in Matthew) quoted above: "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matt. 11:23). The Jerusalem of Jeremiah's day, especially in comparison with Sodom, but also in comparison with Samaria, should have known better. The Jews profited not at all from the advantages they had, nor yet from the warnings they were given in the destruction of Sodom and the scattering of the ten tribes. This was no little aggravation of their guilt. By itself, therefore, this would be reason enough for Ezekiel to say to Jerusalem, "Neither hath Samaria committed half thy sins" (Ezek. 16:51).

But that there is still more involved here is evident from Jeremiah's challenge to the Jews who came to worship at the temple in Jerusalem: "Thus saith the Lord.... Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it saith the Lord" (Jer. 7:3, 11).

Jesus spoke the same language after He "overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves"—in His Father's house. "Ye have made it," Jesus said, "a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:12, 13).

Jeremiah faced a different reality. But it was a profanity equally intolerable. "Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord"—the clear implication being "and I will

not tolerate it." "Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight.... Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be *desolate*" (Jer. 7:11, 14, 15, 34).

The Jews of Jesus' day had become quite accustomed to the hustle and bustle of buying and selling in the temple of the Lord. And they had conveniently rationalized it all away. Admittedly, they would say, the noise level does not add anything to the solemnity of worship in this house, but the purpose of it all is to *facilitate* that worship. Surely this is legitimate. Why would this prophet from Galilee get so angry about this state of affairs?

And the Jews of Jeremiah's day would have said the same. Den of robbers?? What is this prophet from Anathoth talking about? We are *worshippers!* Worshipers of Jehovah God! Any claim that

we are making this house a den of robbers is ludicrous.

Indeed: "...cause Jerusalem to know her abominations." She didn't 'know.' She was in denial.

Jerusalem must be told that it is exactly in this respect that Samaria (and Sodom) had not committed half the sins of Jerusalem—for neither of Jerusalem's sisters had made the house of God "a den of robbers."

"...for *our* admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (I Cor. 10:11). And the very next verse: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (v. 12). We do well therefore, I think, to give this history a closer look, lest we be inclined to think that the primitive, pagan superstitions by which the church of the old dispensation was seduced are far removed from us who live in the enlightened, post-modern, western world.

Next time: My house, a den of robbers. 

*"All these things
happened unto them
for examples:
and they were written
for our admonition,
upon whom the ends
of the world are come"
(I Cor. 10:11).*

The Beast Rising

“And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.”

I Chronicles 12:32

In Revelation 13 the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostle John and to the New Testament church through John two beasts, one rising out of the sea (v. 1) and the other coming out of the earth (v. 11). It is our intention in this and future articles to examine developments in our twenty-first century world in light of this revelation in an attempt to grow in our understanding of the times.

Herman Hoeksema, in chapters 32, 41, and 42 of his significant work on the book of Revelation, *Behold He Cometh*, writes extensively about these beasts. The reader would do well to study that as background information. There Hoeksema identifies this first beast as representative of all the kingdoms of the world, when he writes:

...so the world-kingdom which is represented by this beast is one which combines in itself all the power and glory and ambitions and spirit of all the kingdoms which have aimed at world-power in the past and that do aim at it at the present.¹

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 455.

Mr. Kalsbeek is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2012, p. 463.

Early Manifestations of the Beast out of the Sea

An early manifestation of this beast is seen in the establishment of the kingdom of Nimrod at the Tower of Babel, the purpose of which was to “make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11: 4). God’s direct intervention by confounding their language prevented this premature kingdom of antichrist from purging the earth of its creator and His cause, the church. Revealed in this history is Satan’s world-kingdom goal: a goal that shines through in his attempts to overcome the “deadly wound” (Rev. 13:3) inflicted by God at Babel.

Subsequent attempts of Satan to establish his kingdom through the earthly kingdoms of the world are exposed in Daniel’s prophecy. Here God, by means of the dream of a great image to King Nebuchadnezzar, reveals other historical manifestations of the kingdom of Antichrist. The head of gold (Babylon), breast and arms of silver (Persia), belly and thighs of brass (Greece), and legs of iron (Rome) all demonstrate Satan’s failed attempts to overcome the wound at Babel. The Roman Empire came the closest. No doubt the near success of the Roman Empire was in part due to the sometimes combined efforts of the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman State. Nevertheless these efforts failed as well, in part because of the constant power struggle between church and state.

Satan’s Final Attempt at World-Empire Building

Scripture makes clear that there will be a seemingly successful establishment of the Kingdom of Antichrist. Professor Herman Hanko connects this kingdom to the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream:

The feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image were a mixture of iron and clay. That part of the image was a mixture because it indicated the final manifestation of the one-world government in the Antichristian kingdom. Its mixture indicates its weakness. Its weakness is that it is a union of apostate Christianity in Western civilization and Gog and Magog, the nations on the four corners of the earth. Its position at the feet of the image indicates that it is the final manifestation of all the developments that went before it from Babylon to the end of time. It is the real purpose of Satan, only partially expressed in the other parts of the image, but which, as the feet, supports and gives its true character to all these other parts. It does this by virtue of its being a part of the one image.

The weakness of the final manifestation of a one-world goal is that God's intervention at Babel cannot be overcome by human effort. The diversity of nations and races are too fundamental to be repaired in a sinful world.²

While in the final analysis that is true, for a time it will appear as if Satan has been successful. In his exposition of Revelation 17:7-14 Rev. Herman Hoeksema proposes a way that this uniting of the nations could very well happen:

How then shall the final formation of the beast come to its realization? In order to understand this, we must, in the first place, understand the expression that there shall still be a seventh powerful kingdom which has not yet been [at the time of the apostle John, ck]...if we take in connection with this picture of the seven heads the symbolism of the ten horns (Revelation 17:7), and read that they are all of one mind and shall give their power to the beast, we receive the impression that the future realization of the kingdom of Antichrist shall rather be by way of confederation than by way of conquest.

...it seems that we are justified in drawing the following picture. The text speaks of a seventh mighty power which is still in the future. It had not yet received its dominion at that time. But there can be no question about the fact that it shall receive its dominion. For a short while it shall show its power as a separate power.

² David J. Engelsma and Herman Hanko, *The Reformed Worldview* (Ballymena, N. Ireland: British Reformed Fellowship, 2012), 107.

For it must continue a little while in the midst of all the other kingdoms or powers which may exist together with it. But after this little while is finished, whatever may be the history of it, the other powers, indicated by the ten horns, shall give their power to the beast together with that seventh head, thus forming the great, final confederation, or league, that shall constitute the ultimate form of the antichristian world-power. It shall be a league formed of the seventh head together with the ten horns. And then we can also understand the expression, apparently so difficult to grasp, "The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven." That is, the beast in its entirety, as a confederation of world-powers, all being of one mind and one purpose, and all giving their power to the beast,—that one great league is, in the first place, as such an eighth power. It is distinct from all the seven heads separately, for they formed no confederation. It is the old kingdom of Nimrod over again in modern form....

To recapitulate in brief, therefore, there are to be eight world powers in all. Six have been, in Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The seventh is not yet, or, if it is today, it has not yet become plainly manifest. Its existence shall be peculiar in this respect, that it shall aim at the unification and combination of all the powers that exist at this time. And this shall lead to the final league of nations to realize the kingdom of Antichrist.³

Present Developments that Appear to Confirm Hoeksema's Analysis

This writing of Herman Hoeksema is the fruit of sermons he preached shortly after World War I and in the era of World War II. Much has transpired in our world in the subsequent sixty-plus years that would tend to confirm his analysis.

During the years of his ministry there were two significant attempts to establish an effective Kingdom of Antichrist: after World War I the League of Nations and after World War II the United Nations. Both of these proved to be failures, in large part because the nations were not willing truly to confederate, although the U.N. continues to work toward that goal. True, effective unity of confederation will necessitate relinquishing, at least in part, national sovereignty, something the nations have been hesitant to do. (It may be that the

³ Hoeksema, 575-576.

European Union will show the world how it is to be done, or, more likely, how it is *not* to be done.) This reluctance is certainly understandable when one takes into consideration the history of the nations. Time and again the nations have been at each other's throats and thus have been conditioned to be suspect one of another. The Republic of China, for example, might ask, "Why trust Japan now, when the 'Rape of Nanking' just 70 years ago proved their hatred for us?" Similar concerns by the Russian and German peoples could be expressed due to the atrocities committed by both during World War II. World history records countless other examples that could be cited.

While that question of trust is, and will continue to be, very much an issue, the times almost demand some sort of confederation of the nations that can effectively keep the world from self-destruction. Whether real or imagined, the rise of radical Islam, the proliferation of nuclear weapons by rouge nations, the purported growth of an unsustainable population, the supposed increase of man-caused global warming, and the interconnectedness of world economies, all seem to demand a unified world confederation for solutions.

The Third Way

At present, numerous world luminaries are promoting just such a confederation under the label "The Third Way." On Sunday, April 25, 1999, the then president of the United States, William Jefferson Clinton, hosted a roundtable discussion on the subject, "The Third Way: Progressive Governance for the 21st Century." Those in attendance at the meeting included British Prime Minister Tony Blair, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok, Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Al From, President of the Democratic Leadership Council.

At bottom the Third Way movement is an attempt to blend capitalism, socialism, and communism into a New World Order.

The vision of those behind the Third Way is the need to move away from what they see as a sterile debate between left and right—between those who favor either the state or the free market doing everything.

Instead, they are looking towards a new form of political philosophy that focuses on adapting economies and societies to the demands and pressures of globalization.⁴

Agenda 21

The means of achieving this lofty goal has its roots in the comprehensive plan of action called "Agenda 21." The plan was adopted by the Earth Summit that took place at Rio de Janeiro in June of 1992 and was reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa in August/September, 2002. Those interested in understanding the times would do well to delve into this comprehensive agenda for the world, by consulting available Internet sources. For our purposes we will summarize this freedom-robbing, all-comprehensive agenda by means of a paragraph written by Tom DeWeese of the American Policy Center:

Here [in two documents: "Agenda 21" and the "Biodiversity Treaty," ck] the ideas were officially presented to world leaders that all government on every level, needed to be transformed into top-down control over housing, food production, energy, water, private property, education, population control, gun control, transportation, social welfare, medical care, and literally every aspect of our lives. To get the full picture, add to these the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, both of which create U.N. mandates on abortion, child rearing, and government interference on families.⁵

While Agenda 21 might be passed off by some as mere pie-in-the-sky of a few globalist-thinking radicals, it should be noted that Agenda 21 has been adopted by 178 nations of the world. Furthermore, U.S. President George H.W. Bush signed the document for the United States, which in effect committed the U.S. to the goals of Agenda 21. Not only that, in 1995 President Clinton signed Executive Order #12858 as a commitment to harmonize U.S. environmental policy with the directives

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/771608.stm>.

⁵ Tom DeWeese, "Sustainable Development is the Evil You Face," 8/12/2009, www.worldviewtimes.com/article.php/articledid_5251/Brannon-Howse/Tom-DeWeese.

outlined in Agenda 21. This executive order directs all agencies of the federal government to work with state and local governments to implement the guidelines set forth in Agenda 21. Furthermore, President Obama's science czar, John Holdren, advocates this same agenda in his call for a "Planetary Regime," which would have the power to control the use of all natural resources, regulate international trade, and determine optimum population for the world and for each region of the world.⁶

Agenda 21 is not just theory; it is being implemented as we write. To confirm this, one need only compare

⁶ Ben Johnson, "Obama's Biggest Radical," Front Page, Feb. 27, 2009, www.frontpagemag.com/read/Article.aspx?ARTID=34198.

the goals of Agenda 21 with what is being promoted by the Environmental Protection Agency of the United States. While we do not have the space to go into the details to demonstrate this, neither is that necessary, for the reader is well aware of many of the regulations of the EPA on power plants, oil, coal, and all our natural resources to achieve what they call "sustainable development."

The imposition of this agenda on the nations of the world necessitates a confederation of the existing political powers. Its promotion for acceptance by the peoples of the world employs the process of consensus and the Doctrine of Communitarianism as proclaimed by another beast. However, a discussion of that will have to wait for future articles. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Evangelism Activities

We continue now with some Reformation Day lectures sponsored by our various congregations.

The Evangelism Committee of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC invited their community to join them the evening of October 26 to hear Prof. Russell Dykstra speak on the timely topic, "False Prophets and the Certain End of the World: What the Reformation Can Teach us." Prof. Dykstra promised to answer questions regarding the marks of a false church and what we can know from the Bible about the end of the world.

The Evangelism Committee of

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

the Crete, IL PRC sponsored a lecture on October 26 by Dr. Nathan Lanning, entitled, "A Reformed Analysis of Evolution." Dr. Lanning addressed the modern theories of evolution as taught in Christian and secular universities and how Reformed believers are to respond to these teachings in light of Scripture, the confessions, and the Reformers' understanding of the origins of the universe.

Rev. Ronald Hanko, pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC, delivered a Reformation Day lecture sponsored by First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada on October 26. Rev. Hanko spoke on the subject, "The Church Reformed and Always Reforming."

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spo-

kane, WA, spoke on October 31 at Covenant on the subject, "Martin Luther: Father of the Reformation."

Mission Activities

The last week in October was a significant time in the history of our denomination's mission work in the Philippines. Pastor-elect Vernon Ibe was examined by the combined consistories of the Berean PRC and the First Reformed Church of Bulacan, since their consistories are working together toward a federation. Mr. Ibe preached a sermon on Romans 7:24, 25 and then was examined according to the requirements of Article 4 of the Church Order. His examination was approved by both consistories, and the Berean PRC proceeded to

his ordination and installation on Friday, November 2. That service was led by Rev. David Overway, pastor of the Doon, IA PRC. He preached on Jeremiah 9:23, 24 using the theme, "Glorying in Knowing Jehovah"—a fitting and encouraging sermon for this special occasion. Pastor Overway then read the "Form of Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word." Present for the ceremony of laying on of hands were Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Rev. Overway, Rev. Richard Smit, and Rev. Ronald Van Overloop. Rev. Ibe concluded the worship service by pronouncing the benediction. We thank God for His goodness, and we rejoice with the Berean PRC at His provision of a minister of the Word and Sacraments in their midst. We pray the Lord may give Rev. Ibe a profitable and blessed ministry in His church there.

Sister-Church Activities

Thursday, November 8 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. Early that morning their minister-on-loan, Rev. Andrew Lanning, his wife, Stephanie, and their five children arrived safely after a long flight halfway round the globe. Indeed it was a joyous and exciting moment finally to meet one another face-to-face after weeks of anticipation and preparation for their coming. The Lord certainly answered the prayers of our sister church for an under-shepherd, and we as churches give thanks for that as well. We add our prayers to theirs when we ask that

the Lord bless Rev. Lanning's ministry richly in the church in Singapore to the glory of His name.

The Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore also welcomed Prof. David Engelsma and his wife, Ruth, as well as Elder John Van Baren and his wife, Valerie, into their midst that same morning. They landed on Singapore soil barely half an hour after the Lannings. Prof. Engelsma was in Singapore to speak to our sister church for their annual Reformation Day conference under the theme, "His Church Shall Stand." In addition to speaking several times on that theme, Prof. Engelsma filled their pulpit on the Lord's Day and, at the request of CERC's session, preached a special sermon in connection with Rev. Lanning's taking up the work of MOL.

Congregation Activities

On behalf of the Hope PRC Council in Walker, MI, Elder John Van Baren and Deacon Henry Vander Waal were sent to visit Yangon, Myanmar. Plans called for these men to be in Myanmar in mid-November. These delegates were sent to visit and encourage Rev. Titus and the saints in the Protestant Reformed Churches of Myanmar. They were also assigned a list of objectives and questions to consider regarding the ecclesiastical and benevolent work that continues there.

The ladies of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada were invited by the ladies of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB to attend a lecture, with lunch following, on November 7. Rev. Thomas Miersma, pastor at

Immanuel, spoke to the ladies from Colossians 3:15-16.

The Consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC invited anyone interested, but especially all present officebearers, to a four-week class entitled, "Elders and Counseling." This class, taught by Prof. Barrett Gritters, was held Sunday afternoons at Hudsonville during the month of October and the first Sunday in November. In those four meetings Prof. Gritters led in-depth studies on the subjects of: "The Need for and the Ability of Others (elders especially) to Help Pastors in Counseling"; "The Elements of a Good Counseling Session/Visit"; "Change in Counseling: The Primary (and Hopeful) Doctrine of Conversion"; and "Marriage: Problems and Prevention." For those unable to attend in person, the audio of the conference was streamed live over the Internet, which enabled others in various of our churches to benefit as well.

School Activities

Many thanks to all involved with the choir program given by the students of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI on Sunday evening, November 4. It was a fitting and joyful way to close the Lord's day hearing choral music from the Cantata, Concert Chorale, and Chamber Singers of Covenant.

Minister Activities

On Sunday, November 11, the Randolph, WI PRC extended a call to Rev. W. Langerak to serve as their pastor. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Southwest PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Elder Dick Kuiper in the loss of his father,

CLARENCE KUIPER.

1 Thessalonians 4:14: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Rev. Arie den Hartog, President
Gary Boverhof, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of First PRC of Holland wish to express their Christian sympathy to Rich and Nancy Bosman and family in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother,

TENA BOSMAN.

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

Rev. Daniel Holstege, President
Glenn Kotman, Assistant Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Bill DenBesten and their daughter Nancy Zuitenhorst in the death of his sister,

AUDREY DEN BESTEN.

May they be comforted by the truth of God's Holy Word. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

Rev. David Overway, President
Perry VanEgdom, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ To Clarice Gritters, his wife of 62 years, and many years member of Mary Martha Society, and to present members: daughter Jeanne Karsemeyer, daughter-in-law Brenda Gritters, and granddaughters Amy Gritters and Lorianne Karsemeyer, and also our President, son Mike Gritters, and to all the family: our sincere Christian sympathy in the death of

MR. ED GRITTERS.

May the Lord's peace enfold the family, knowing that his pilgrimage is done, he has gone Home. Isaiah 51:11: "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Gary Gaastra, Vice-president
Linda Smit, Secretary
Mary Martha Society
Hope PRC, Redlands

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Hope PRC, Redlands expresses Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Mr. Darin Gritters and to the family, including Mrs. Clarice Gritters, Mr. and Mrs. Mike and Brenda Gritters, Mr. and Mrs. Ed and Jeanne Karsemeyer and their families in the loss of a dear husband, father, and grandfather and to Mr. and Mrs. Otto and Mary Gail Gaastra and their family in the loss of a dear brother-in-law and beloved uncle,

MR. EDWIN GRITTERS,

whom the Lord brought home to be with Him. May their comfort and confidence be found in Scripture as it expresses this life as a pilgrimage and that we have a sure and expected end to our journey. "For I know the thoughts I have toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Rev. Brian Huizinga, President
Peter Smit, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With praise and thanks to God, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

GERRY and ALICE GUICHELAAR, as they celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on December 14th, 2012. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together. We are thankful for their godly example to us as they raised us to trust in Him and fear His Name. We pray that God will continue to guide them and keep them in His loving care, and to bless them in the years to come. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- * Ray and Nanda Kikkert
Emma, Haley, Caleb, Mia
- * Jurjen and Dinara Guichelaar
- * David and Rita Guichelaar
Emily, Ethan
- * Erik and Cherith Guichelaar
Kennedy

Wingham, ON, Canada

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 2013, at the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk

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