

The Standard Bearer

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Synod issue

2019 highlights

The church of Christ in Laodicea

Rev. Ron VanOverloop

Highlights of Synod 2019

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Pictures of Synod 2019



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Meditation

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan

The church of Christ in Laodicea*

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot.... He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Revelation 3:14-22

There are two reasons for the selection of this passage for our pre-synodical prayer service. The first is that it is my custom when preaching other than in my home church to use a recent sermon or Bible study passage, instead of assuming that I know what passage would be best. The second reason is that 47 years ago a senior seminarian seeking synodical approval to be declared a candidate for the ministry preached a sermon before the synod based on this passage.

Our text is a part of Jesus’ word to the seven churches. John was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia” (Rev. 1:10, 11). John then sees Jesus “in the midst of the seven candlesticks” (Rev. 1:13) and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches (1:20). Jesus is described as the glorified Christ who was dead but now lives and has the keys of hell and death. He commands John to write the things that He saw and the things that are, and the things that shall be hereafter (1:19). The letters to the seven churches detail the things that are. While each letter detailed the spiritual condition of each local congregation, all of the letters were to be read in all seven congregations.

While there were many other true churches located elsewhere in the world at that time, God providentially ordered all things so that these seven churches portray the true church of Jesus Christ in the world at any given

time in the new dispensation. This implies that all of the characteristics of these seven churches are found in varying degrees in every true church.

We pray that the Spirit of Jesus Christ will enable us to understand what the faithful and true Witness said to the local congregation in the city of Laodicea and may He enable us to apply His Word to ourselves.

To whom is this letter addressed?

We deny the Arminian interpretation that this passage, and especially verse 20, is addressed to the unregenerated sinner. That view presents a begging Jesus, who is calling and knocking on the door of the sinner’s heart, but is helpless to enter it. He is begging the sinner to open his heart so that Jesus might enter and save him. This interpretation is wrong for three reasons.

First, this description of Jesus is contrary to that given of Him in the first chapter. There we learn that His eyes are as a flame of fire (1:14), His voice is “as the sound of many waters” (1:15), out of His mouth comes “a sharp two-edged sword” (1:16), and His appearance is as the sun shining in its strength (1:16). Before such a glorious Christ, John falls as dead (1:17). Jesus is not helpless when confronting a sinner, for He has the keys of the grave and of death (1:18). He has the keys and when He opens no man can shut, and when He shuts no man can open (3:7). He is not helpless and begging—He is the sovereign Lord and King.

Second, natural man is so depraved that he is accurately described as spiritually dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). He is unable to choose for Christ, and he is incapable of understanding the spiritual things of God (I Cor. 2:14). He cannot open to let Jesus enter.

Third, this letter is written to a local, instituted church, which is a true church of Jesus Christ. The congregation at Laodicea, with the other six addressed in chapters two and three, was a type of the true church of Jesus Christ at any time in the history of the world. To this church Jesus expresses His love (19), which love elected and always saves.

*2019 Pre-synodical sermon, June 10, 2019.

At this time in history the city of Laodicea was generally quite wealthy due to being on a major trade route. It is likely that the Christian church in the city of Laodicea and its members participated in this wealth, as seen in their self-judgment: they saw themselves as “rich, and increased with goods,” and having need of nothing (17). The city was located near Hierapolis, which was known for its hot, medicinal springs. Also nearby was the city of Colosse (cf. Col. 2:1), in which were found refreshing, cold springs.

It is believed that this congregation, with the other six, were established through the work of the apostle Paul while he was in Ephesus during his second missionary journey. So this Christian church is approximately forty years old when Jesus says these words to this congregation. It is a true church, but its spiritual condition is described by the faithful and true Witness (14) as being “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (17b). The spiritual condition of the congregation as a whole was spiritually impoverished and without a true righteous walk. Jesus said it was “lukewarm.” He wanted it to be either cold or hot but, because it is lukewarm, He is ready to spew it out of His mouth (16). As lukewarm, they were spiritually lethargic, without zeal and enthusiasm, lacking their first love. When the members arrogantly boasted of themselves that they were rich and increased with goods and needed nothing, they obviously judged their religious activity as just fine. They were doing what they were supposed to do: attending Sunday services and giving generously. They were so satisfied with themselves that they were blind to the reality of their real need. They had the truth of God’s Word objectively, but without a responsive ardent love for God and for Jesus, and without broken hearts and contrite spirits, namely, meekness and humbleness of mind. They were not hot against error and sin—in others probably, but not in themselves. They were not fervent to obey the word of their King.

The church and the Christian who sees himself as rich have no need for the Savior. Jesus saves from sin, but they were rich and did not need Him. Jesus was, for all intents and purposes, outside!

The King’s powerful, effective call

King Jesus stands before this Christian church at Laodicea and He calls. He is the One whose “voice is as the sound of many waters” (1:15). He is the One who taught unlike anyone else. He is the One who spoke and it was done (John 1:3). He is the One who healed many sick just by speaking.

Before this church He stands as the “Amen, the faithful and true witness” (14). He delivers a powerful

word of rebuke. He undresses this lukewarm congregation. With His voice He knocks, rebuking and chastening (19) in order to jar them out of their spiritual slumber. He is showing them that their physical health and material wealth really amounted to nothing. It was only an empty show. So were their sacrifices and burnt offerings (cf. Hosea 6:6), their Sunday attendance and Sunday clothes. The Lord is not begging, but with flaming eyes He is admonishing them to wake up from their spiritual lethargy and to repent. He is chastening His church (19).

The angel of this congregation is to read this specific letter to them, but also the letters to the other six congregations that make up the true church. And the angel is to read the whole of this book of the revelation of Jesus Christ. The remainder of this book details the control that the Lord Jesus has of all the new dispensational history, so that all things lead up to His return to judge.

The call of King Jesus to this church is irresistible, efficient, and effective. His voice and knocking bring the regenerated and converted to renewed repentance and conversion, that is, to change their minds (thinking that they were rich) and activity (thinking that they needed nothing). He works in them repentance of their proud self-satisfaction. They are to have a deep and constant consciousness of how much they need the Savior every moment of every day. To know how much we need Jesus we must know our constant sinfulness, that vicious nature against which we have to struggle all our life-long. The constant presence of our depraved old man is what identifies us as poor, blind, and naked.

Jesus calls them to return to the Rock from which they have been hewn. They are to go back to Him who is the “beginning” or essence of God’s creation (14). He is what this world and our lives are all about. He is to be known and sought as the Fountain of all good—not once, but always! Of Him we are to buy gold—the true and glorious riches that endure forever. From Him we are to receive “white raiment”—the true righteousness that alone covers our spiritual nakedness. And He alone is the Source of the eye-salve that takes away the scales that blind us to ourselves and to Jesus, so we can accurately see God, the truth, and thus gain an accurate understanding of ourselves and our sinfulness. Then we can see the truth and what is of real and lasting importance.

Jesus’ call includes a warning: if there is no repentance, then He will spew thee out of His mouth. This is divine rejection.

And this call implies divine love. He rebukes and chastens because He loves (cf. Prov. 3:11, 12; Deut. 8:5; John 15:2; and Heb. 12:5).

The wonderful promises

The first promise is to those who are moved by Jesus' voice to open unto Him. To hear His voice is to be enabled to hear the Shepherd's efficient call that works genuine repentance. His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him!

To them He gives promise of sweet fellowship. Jesus is speaking of communion, not union. He will come in, that is, He will no longer be as outside. He assures all those who express godly sorrow that He will not leave them nor forsake them. He will not spew them out of His mouth, but the exact opposite. They will know sweet communion with the King: He will sup with them and they with Him. This figure of home life portrays the communion of salvation in Jesus Christ. This describes the experience of God dwelling with us, making His home with us and drawing us into His own divine family life. This describes our knowing that His goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life

and assures that we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 23:6). When the Savior King comes in, then He abides and lives with us in the intimate relationship of love and peace. This describes what the condition of the church (and believer) ought always to be—conscious that God is our God.

The second promise is that He will give us the privilege of sitting with Him in His throne, even as He was honored to sit down with His Father in His throne (21). When Jesus ascended, He went into heaven and sat on the right hand of God (I Pet. 3:22). Jesus promises the privilege of our ruling with Him in eternity, sharing His dominion in the new heavens and earth.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” We may believe that the local Christian church at Laodicea was moved to heed the Lord Jesus, because in A.D. 363 there was an important church council that was held in Laodicea. May we hear. May I hear.



Editorial

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

Highlights of Synod 2019

The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches met from June 11-17, completing all the work in its agenda in five days. This report on the decisions of synod can be brief, due to the reality that a rather complete preview was given in the June 1 *SB* and that reports on the actions of Synod 2019 are available on the website prca.org under the “current/news” tab.

When thinking of the highlights, one might quickly overlook the pre-synodical service. That would be a mistake. Rev. R. VanOverloop, president of the synod in 2018, led the service, preaching from Revelation 3 on the church of Laodicea. That gets one's attention. I suspect that many in the audience wondered as I did: Why this text? Why a sermon to the synod on the church that is “neither cold nor hot,” but whom the Lord is ready to “spew” out of His mouth? The personal answer of the preacher was that 1) he had recently studied the seven churches of Revelation 2-3, and 2) he had (47 years previous) been a graduating student who preached

on Revelation 3:20 for his synodical sermon. But there was, he assured us, plenty of application to each of us personally in the Lord's word to the church and Laodicea, without identifying the PRC as the church of Laodicea. And apply it he did. What of the material circumstances of Laodicea? “I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17). Materially, that is true of the PRC, as the next few days would make plain in synod's decisions. The Lord has given the churches the material means to support all the work of the church with little hardship. I will leave the matter there and recommend that you read the sermon in this issue and in the *Acts* when they are distributed. The pre-synodical sermon, a highlight of Synod 2019.

The second highlight was the examination of the two students, Mr. Matt Kortus and Mr. Jacob Maatman. The process began on Tuesday with their delivering sermons before a large audience of synod and many visitors. The synod approved the sermons, noting the

gifts that God had given to these men both in making and delivering the sermons. In the eight hours of oral examination that followed (Wednesday and Thursday), the men demonstrated that they had prepared well, and that they were convinced of the truth they spoke. Synod unanimously approved them as candidates for the ministry, eligible for a call on July 13. The commencement of the Protestant Reformed Theological School was held Thursday evening in the First Protestant Reformed Church to a nearly full sanctuary. The address was based on I Timothy 4:16, “Take Heed to Thyself and to the Doctrine.” Thanks be to God for giving two more ministers of the Word!



A third highlight of synod was the presence of the three delegates from our sister churches. Rev. M. McGeown (missionary in the Limerick Reformed Fellowship, sent by Covenant PRC, Northern Ireland) is very familiar with both American and PRC culture, as well as the deliberations of a PRC synod. Both Pastor John Flores (from the PRC Philippines) and Deacon Lee Meng Hsien (Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church Singapore) attended synod for the first time. They spoke of “learning much” from the week of meetings.

But why give this as a highlight and what is the value of the men coming from sister churches? First and foremost, it is significant because these men represent churches in foreign lands who stand shoulder to shoulder with the Protestant Reformed Churches in America in doctrine, in worship, and in walk of life. The PRC stand virtually alone in North America in its battle for such truths as the unconditional covenant, sovereign particular grace, and the permanency of marriage. Our sister churches join the PRC in affirming these truths and rejecting marriage after divorce, common grace, and the well-meant offer of the gospel. Nothing significant divides us.

In addition, all four churches/denominations agree that “no mere formal [ecclesiastical] 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 Christ” [Contact Committee Constitution, V, C, 1, a, 2)]. The relationship must be meaningful. Face-to-face meetings contribute much to a real and meaningful relationship. To that end, the

PRCA send delegations to our sister churches once a year, as a rule. This helps the CC understand their situations, the place in their respective countries, their cultures, and their struggles. And yearly the sister churches send a delegate to the PRCA synod. We trust this helps our sister churches understand the PRCA.

Certainly, the delegates come to an understanding of how a PR synod works. They soon detect that it is not a political gathering where men are vying for votes for their particular cause. It is rather an ecclesiastical gathering where the standards for making deci-



sions are the Bible and the Reformed Confessions, guided by the good direction of the Church Order. And a synod is deliberative, where men discuss freely, debate and disagree, but in the spirit of brotherly love, and each delegate truly believes that all the delegates are just as concerned about the welfare of Christ’s church and the glory of God as he—yes, also those who hold a contrary position on a particular motion.

In conclusion, it is a joy to have the men from the Philippines, Singapore, and Ireland present with us and telling the synod of the work that Christ continues to do in their churches. In addition, all three made special mention of their churches’ appreciation for the sister relationship. Singapore in particular expressed gratitude for the help that the PRCA are giving in supplying them during their vacancy.

Synod dealt with another matter that has been somewhat contentious, namely, Psalter revision. In 2016 the PRCA agreed to work on Psalter revision with two Reformed denominations who use and love the Psalter, the Heritage Reformed and the Free Reformed. The PRCA has specific theological differences with both denominations, and concern has been expressed that the other denominations may bring their theology into the Psalter revision. However, year after year, synod examines the work done to date and judges, among other things, faithfulness to Scripture (the Psalms) and theological faithfulness. The same was done at the Synod of 2019. Of note is that the revision is making the Psalter more faithful to Scripture and more theologically correct. A specific example is found in the change made in Psalter 255. I well recall my seminary days when I was to give a word of edification in a local PRCA, and one of the numbers I had chosen was Psalter 255. In the consistory room

before the service, one elder asked, “You do not plan to sing stanza 4, do you?” The current stanza 4 is a total misrepresentation of Psalm 95 and starts, “While He proffers peace and pardon, let us hear His voice today” which is a blatant well-meant offer. The interdenominational Psalter revision committee recommends that this be changed to: “God proclaims His great salvation, let us hear His voice today.” This is in harmony with Psalm 95, especially as interpreted in Hebrews 3 and 4.

Still on the Psalter, this year’s Synod followed without debate the decision of Synod 2018, namely, that the PRC believes there are too many changes being made in the revision and will likely not adopt *all* that the committee is recommending. To that end, the Synod mandated the Contact Committee to come to Synod 2020 with a proposed committee of PRC members who will carefully examine all that the Psalter revision committee has done and, at a future synod, bring recommendations on what to use in our Psalter. Incidentally, the work has progressed through the first 100 Psalms.

Synod dealt carefully with various protests. Two members protested the 2018 Synod’s decision on the proper place of good works in our salvation (Acts 20:18, Art. 62). Both protestants expressed general agreement with the decision but had objections to some parts. The decision of synod was not to change any part of last year’s decision. In the main, the explanation of 2019 may help explain the decision of 2018 for others who read that (decision of 2018) and wonder about a few aspects.

Of particular importance is the 2019 Synod’s decision not to reject the phrase “in the way of.” Synod pointed out, with concrete examples, that this expres-

sion is found in Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, and in the writings of Reformed theologians, including John Calvin and Herman Hoeksema.

I believe these decisions will be helpful. Synod was unanimous in these decisions.

From personal experience as a preacher, I know the importance of this phrase. Years ago, this was pointed out to me (a young minister) as the proper way to express the relationship between obedience and blessing. I had preached on the calling of parents to rear their children in the fear of the Lord. The text indicated that God blessed parents who do this. Perhaps the elder, a very wise elder, saw that I was struggling to express that relationship. He came to me privately and explained that the proper relationship is “in the way of.” Parents see the salvation of their children in the way of faithfulness to God’s commands. *Not*, he said, a little louder for emphasis, *because* of their faithfulness. Lesson learned. Rarely have I ever used the phrase “in the way of” without adding (a little louder for emphasis), “Not because of...” It is my prayer that God will use these decisions for peace and unity in the churches.

Finally, a highlight of the synod was the fine hospitality of First Protestant Reformed Church. A hearty thanks to all who contributed to the smooth running of things, and especially I have in mind the ladies who served and served and served—coffee, snacks healthy and otherwise, and fine meals.

Do take the time to read the 2019 Acts when they are distributed.

Synod 2020 is set for Trinity Protestant Reformed Church.

Editor’s notes

In this issue is a “Contribution” submitted at the request of the editors, after the family who wrote it had corresponded with the editors about the role of elders in counseling especially difficult cases. The article is printed without the authors’ names, at their request. After reading the article, it will become plain why the authors’ names are withheld.

This issue also includes a letter from Rev. Nathan Langerak responding to Rev. Koole’s response to Rev. N. Langerak’s first letter back in the November 15, 2018 *SB*. The editors print the letter at the request of the RFP Board. Rev. Koole indicates that his previous articles of response to other letters serve as his response to this letter. The readers may re-read them as they are found in the November 15, 2018; April 15, 2019; and May 15, 2019 issues. For a thorough, Reformed presentation on faith and works, readers are encouraged to

read Rev. Martyn McGeown’s “Faith: A Bond, a Gift, and an Activity, but Not a Condition for Salvation” in the April 2019 *PR Theological Journal*, available at prcts.org/journal.

Finally, a word of explanation on the article by Rev. Griess. Rev. Griess wrote a series of articles on worship (November 15, 2012–July 2017). By mutual agreement, Rev. Griess took some time off from writing. At that time it was agreed to hold back this article because it was possible that Rev. Griess would pick up this rubric on worship. However, plans have changed, and Rev. Griess will be writing on a new topic in the next volume year. To complete his writings on worship, we now print this last installment. Perhaps it will kindle a desire to go back and read the entire series.

—Prof. R. Dykstra



Delegates to Synod 2019

Left to right: Kevin VanOverloop, Prof. B. Gritters, Rev. C. Spronk, Prof. D. Kuiper, Rev. R. VanOverloop, Rev. G. Eriks, Don Terpstra, Rev. C. Griess, Prof. R. Dykstra, Brian Gritters, Peter VanDerSchaaf, Prof. R. Cammenga, Gary Lanning, Rev. S. Key, Bert Worries, Lee Meng Hsien, Rev. J. Laning, Al Meurer, Rev. J. Flores, Rev. B. Huizinga, Rick Gritters, Hilgard Goosen, Rev. C. Haak, Rev. D. Kleyn, Rev. M. McGeown, Michael Bosveld, Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. R. Kleyn



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Committee 2



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Committee 4

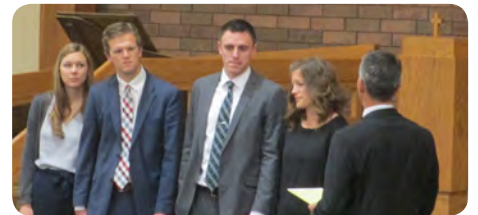


Committee 5





PR Theological School
Commencement
June 13, 2019:
Matthew Kortus,
Jacob Maatman



January 7, 2019

Dear Editors of the *Standard Bearer*,

I read Rev. Koole's rebuttal of my blog post in the *Standard Bearer*. He reiterates without proof that the controversy recently decided by synod was about the question, "what is to be judged as antinomianism?" Can he not see that this matter of antinomianism only came up as a false charge against objections to preaching that compromised the gospel of grace? The gospel of grace in its criticism of that preaching was charged with being antinomian.

In his response Rev. Koole continues to press his point about the threat of antinomianism that he "fears," by criticizing "men full of misguided zeal for the truth that the salvation of the sinner is *all* of grace, and therefore *all* of God (in reaction to Arminianism or work-righteousness), but doing so by insisting that the preaching emphasize simply what God has done for us (prompting the believer to gratitude) and that the preacher then steer clear of stressing also how the hearer is called to live if he will experientially know the salvation and approval of his God." Is this a description of the kind of men "that loudly subscribe to the Canons and then proceed to trouble the churches with their antinomian sentiments again and again"? Is this a description of "those of an antinomian strain...in our churches"? Since he is referring to preachers in our churches my questions are: who are they and what have they preached or written to which he can point as evidence of their misguided zeal?

But there is something curious about these misguided preachers. Are they a description of the real opponent *in this controversy* for Rev. Koole and the real problem in our churches as he sees it?

Let us examine the thinking of these preachers. They have a zeal for protecting the doctrine of salvation all of grace. They do that out of loathing for Arminianism and work-righteousness. In their preaching they emphasize simply what God has done for us. They believe that this prompts gratitude. What preachers! They would build up faith since the gospel is not what one must do for salvation, but what God has accomplished by Jesus Christ and applies to us for salvation.

Rev. Koole accuses these men of antinomianism because they "steer clear of stressing also how the hearer is called to live if he will experientially know the salvation and approval of God." These preachers are not accused of avoiding preaching on how the believer is called to live in thankfulness for his salvation. They are not accused of minimizing the law of God and the call

to sanctified living. They are not accused of avoiding the exhortations and admonitions of the Word of God. Doing that, they could legitimately be charged with antinomianism.

So what is this doctrine that earns a preacher the label of *antinomian* if he avoids it? "How the hearer is called to live" means obedience to the law of God. Rev. Koole makes the hearer's experiential knowledge of the salvation and approval of God dependent on the hearer's obedience. These preachers are condemned as antinomian because they will not tell the people that if they will know the salvation and approval of God they must obey the law of God. Rev. Koole adds the word *experientially*. But to know the salvation and the approval of God is experiential.

The apostle says we know the salvation and approval of God by faith: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:8-11).

Our obedience he calls the righteousness which is of the law. This he counts loss and dung to be found in Christ with the righteousness of God which is by faith. On the ground of that righteousness we know both the salvation and the approval of God experientially since our salvation consists in the forgiveness of sins and justification, which is the approval of God. *That I may know him* is the translation of the Greek infinitive of purpose. He says forsaking our own obedience as righteousness is necessary *in order that* we know Christ, know the power of His resurrection, and know the fellowship of His sufferings. To know Christ is to know Him as the complete Savior personally and experientially who saves from the guilt and the pollution of sin. To know the power of His resurrection is to know personally and experientially the power of the resurrection of Christ to justify and grant eternal life and to transform the believer and make him a new creature in all his life. To know the fellowship of His sufferings is to know the persecution of the world because the believer stands in the world that hates Christ confessing His truth and living to His glory. So long as we hold on to our obedience as necessary to know the salvation and the approval of

God—for righteousness—we are ignorant of Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering. The apostle says that we know all these treasures of Christ—experientially—only by casting off our obedience for righteousness and having Christ and His righteousness by faith. In short, we know all this by faith because we know Christ by faith.

In light of the passage, is it not wrong to teach that obedience is the *if* on which the experiential knowledge of the salvation and approval of God depends? Where is this doctrine in the creeds? Is this an example of the “development” that “needs to be done” in “understanding grace in its sanctifying power?”

If making the knowledge of the salvation and approval of God depend on obedience is the idea behind the novel quest that Rev. Koole suggests for “wording” that “may be used in the preaching...to prompt and promote godliness,” then, I say, “No thank you.” Making some aspect of salvation—also the experience of it—dependent on works does not prompt godliness, but promotes a smug self-righteousness.

I like these imaginary preachers, then. I wish they were real men. I find that their zeal for the truth that salvation is all of God manifests itself in avoiding the doctrine that Rev. Koole praises as essential to the gospel and for avoiding which he charges them with antinomianism. They are not antinomian at all, but preach the gospel. Rev. Koole’s imaginary preachers—and all who are like them—are to be commended for avoiding that kind of preaching. I doubt they would have any interest in Rev. Koole’s quest for “wording” to “prompt godliness.”

Rev. Koole gets exercised about one of a series of questions that I asked in my blog post. I asked, “Are they [good works] fruits of faith or do works along with faith obtain? Is fellowship with the Father by faith and by the good works that faith produces? Is salvation by faith and by the works of faith?” Rev. Koole says. “The first two can pass inspection, but the third?... As if that was what Hope’s consistory was approving, what was being preached from their pulpit, and most of its members were oblivious to? And that this is what Classis East was willing to defend by its decisions? That is a serious misrepresentation. *That* was not the issue before synod. To indicate that it was is not honest or helpful.”

As if...!

What if?

What if it was preached, approved, and defended, and thus before synod, that “we do good works to have our prayers answered...we do good works so that we can receive God’s grace and Holy Spirit in our conscience...obedience is required here, obedience that I must per-

form in order to enjoy fellowship with God.... The way of a holy life matters; it is the way to the Father” (Acts of Synod 2018).

All this preached, approved, and defended under the banner of prompting and promoting godliness and exposing radical antinomians of all shades.

Synod said these condemned statements compromised justification and the unconditional covenant. If justification and the covenant are about anything, they are about the truth that *salvation* is by faith *alone* and not by faith and faith’s works.

It is surprising that Rev. Koole would see any difference between the three questions that I asked. He accepts the first two as legitimate, but the third is simply the extension of them. How are they different? The three questions that I asked do not present the truth over against three different errors, but over against one and the same error that can be stated three different ways more or less subtly. They are all equally serious because they all compromise justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant.

I wonder if the new search to find “wording” to “prompt godliness” was not begun because synod took away words and phrases that many thought were a fine way to prompt godliness and criticism of which was judged antinomian, but that in fact compromised the gospel.

His imaginary preachers will not preach “how the hearer is called to live if he will experientially know the salvation and approval of God.” The sad thing is that Rev. Koole criticizes them for a reactionary and misguided zeal for grace and condemns them as antinomian. I challenge the editor of the *Standard Bearer* to explain how the fault that he finds with those preachers differs at all from the theology of the statements quoted above. If those preachers are antinomian, then synod was dead wrong.

I wish there were more of these “antinomian” preachers. They remind me of Hoeksema who wrote, “If the preaching of the law would leave the impression with the church of Jesus Christ that somehow we must add to the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ our Lord, then, of course, it would be far better that we never heard at all of the law again” (*Triple Knowledge*, vol. 3, 443).

Cordially in Christ,
Nathan J. Langerak

Elders and counseling

God has ordained elders for their place in the church, and God has worked in them spiritually in their upbringing in their homes, in catechism and in the preaching, to prepare them for the work they will need to do in their office. But this training is not sufficient for all the help some saints need. This contribution is not to criticize the work of our ministers and elders, but to make everyone more aware of some of the great and difficult needs of hurting saints, which the ministers and elders alone are not able to meet.

(Read Prof. B. Gritters' articles on depression in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* Volumes 51 and 52, found at prcts.org/journal, in which he writes of the additional care that is sometimes necessary.)

When elders enter the office, God does not automatically endow them with knowledge for every need He gives His sheep. Their knowledge of the Word of God gives them the ability to help and counsel saints in many areas, and leaning upon God's grace, they will capably use that knowledge with wisdom, love, and strength to guide the saints in those spiritual needs, needs of soul, mind, and spirit. But there are physical and mental needs of the sheep that go beyond the knowledge and ability of the ministers and elders. These needs vary greatly.

First, there are sheep who live in sin, and reap all the consequences of that sin, whom the ministers and elders need to deal with from God's Word to convict them of their sin and lead them to repentance and turning, and aid them in that turning. The intense follow-up and the continual daily help needed in some cases is not something ministers and elders can do. Then there are the sheep who are depressed and experience the heavy weight in body, mind, and soul that that depression brings. When those sheep go to their pastor or elder, it is in their hands to begin to help those sheep, but where do they begin? How do they know how to find the cause of their depression? The possibilities are many. Do they begin by telling the sheep that depression is sin, and that they must look for that sin and repent? Do they begin by asking the sheep if they are reading their Bibles and praying? What if the saint says, "I do but it doesn't help?" What if the sheep say they cannot pray? Does the pastor or elder tell those sheep to go home and try harder? Perhaps the answers to these questions is yes, but do they also ask the saint if they have seen their physician? Do they also ask the sheep if they have been sinned against?

Every need is at bottom, a spiritual need, and the work of the minister or elder in every need is necessary and not to be disregarded or overlooked. But beyond the spiritual aspect of the need, God has given skills to medical doctors for physical needs and mental institutions and psychologists for the severely abused and traumatized in brain by sexual abuse or spousal abuse, so that they may once again be able to read and pray, and be able to be helped by their pastor and elders. May our ministers and elders always be careful out of love for the hurting to see when their work alone might not be sufficient.

At times our churches have dealt with saints with depression and trauma with great wisdom, and at other times with less discernment. For the sake of every sheep to whom God has given heavy afflictions, and in obedience to God's command to care for His sheep, may we become more educated and zealous to be actively helping those hurting sheep in every area of need.

There are many great resources available that teach the truth about trauma; what it is and what it does. There are books and speeches on the Internet by Christians with decades of experience in this field. It would be profitable to research these resources.

In God's great wisdom He has given members of our immediate family to experience three different types of needs. In and through experience only we have come to see how each need (trapped in sin, biological depression, and depression brought on by another's sin of abuse), must be met entirely differently, and how each needed help beyond the wonderful help given by their pastors and elders.

One need involved living in the sin of misuse of alcohol for many years. By the mighty grace of God our son was brought to repentance. He spent hours and days rejoicing in God's Word and his pastor worked closely with him, and saw it wise to make him accountable daily, and gave him a connection to a qualified saint with whom he daily corresponded by email, to keep him in the Word, and keep him accountable. A few times the guidance given was not Reformed, but our son was not led astray because God preserves His saints in the faith they learned from their youth, and our son recognized the errors. Here we began to see that the great work the pastor does along with the necessary help from outside of our churches were both needed and used in God's gracious healing.

Another need involved a child who became severely depressed. After many months of desperately searching Scripture and prayers of anguish to God, not only was there no relief, but only added despair and doubt. Her pastor told her to see her doctor, but she did not want to for fear of becoming addicted to pills. When she called her pastor one evening in despair, he told her to read her Bible. He knew she was, and it had not been helping. He told her to read more. She tried, and it left her in despair and hopelessness. With wisdom and love he called her first thing the next morning and firmly encouraged her to call her doctor. She was diagnosed with post-partum depression, and with the help of medication she was again able to read Scripture with joy and understanding and belief. In time she was relieved of her depression.

A third need arose when a child of ours was sexually abused as an early teenager, and silently suffered the effects of that abuse for decades before telling anyone. When it became obvious that she was not safe and was unable to function, with the wise guidance of her pastor, she was admitted to a mental institution. This institution referred her to a psychologist, a godly woman, educated in the science of how to work with abuse brain trauma. God worked mightily through the means of this doctor to begin the long, slow process of healing. All this time, her pastor and elders were by her side with their loving care.

By God's grace, our family's ministers and elders understood that their help alone was not sufficient. Just as an elder cannot set a broken bone, so they are unable to heal an abused brain. The help of an experienced counsellor, a medical doctor, and a Christian psychologist all provided help the elders and ministers alone could not give. Each was necessary for the healing of these sheep. And they were never neglected by their ministers and elders.

Another area in which additional help is needed is the area of spousal abuse. It is extremely necessary here too to seek help for the abused and the abuser that the minister and elder alone might not be able to give. Abuse is never a two-way street. Not in sexual abuse and not in spousal abuse. Spousal abuse is not a marriage problem. Yes, both spouses come into the marriage as sinners, but the word abuse means to use wrongly, to exploit, or take advantage of. The abuse comes out of the heart of the abuser, not as a reaction to the sin of another. The abuser uses power to control, manipulate, and intimidate, for his (or her) own satisfaction. This power of abuse becomes a pattern and shows itself in different ways—yes physical, but also emotional, spiritual, financial, and verbal. God's Word tells us of the power of the tongue in Proverbs 18:21, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the

fruit thereof." The tongue kills. The abused spouse experiences in some ways, similar trauma to the sexually abused—undeserved shame, grief, guilt, and fear. Sometimes ministers and elders do not recognize the extreme ability all abusers have to manipulate and lie, and therefore much of the blame gets put on the abused, who is then asked what they did to provoke this abuse, and who is told to go home and be much in prayer and try harder to please and glorify God in their submission (or leadership), only adding more guilt to the abused. A large part of this abuse is the manipulation in the often repeated "I'm sorry" by the abuser. And forgiveness is demanded before repentance is proven.

We are well aware that not all of the hurting sheep in our churches have received the wise care our family has. This grieves us. We write so that all may understand the wisdom needed by each of our ministers and elders in seeking help beyond that which they are able to give when necessary. May God graciously give that necessary understanding, for the healing of His hurting sheep.

We may not hide our heads in the sand. These sins are found in our churches. They have been in the past and they are now. And many sheep continue to suffer. They do not all speak up. They are hesitant to reveal what has been done to them because of undeserved shame, guilt, and fear, and because they are re-traumatized in the telling. May we endeavor to help the abused and to work to bring the abuser to repentance by discipline and guidance.

We may not forget God's warnings concerning these sins:

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18:6)

"And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart." (Zech. 7:10)

And may we remember Jesus' words of blessing to those who stand with and help the needy: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:40)

An excellent book to learn more concerning these needs is: *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (New Growth Press, 2015), by Diane Langberg, a Christian psychologist for over 45 years. Her godly, Christ-centered approach to helping abuse trauma sufferers is evident in her writing. Her videos are also very helpful:

- On child sexual abuse: <http://foconline.org/talk/counselling-victims-sexual-abuse>

• On spousal abuse: <http://foclonline.org/talk/counselling-victims-domestic-abuse>
And lastly a book on childhood sexual abuse: *Rid*

of My Disgrace by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb (Crossway, 2011).
Parents in the Protestant Reformed Churches



O come, let us worship

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

The Reformation and the Lord's Supper in worship

Previous article in this series: July 2017, p. 427.

Introduction

The Lord's Supper in the dialogue of worship was not always understood the scriptural way we have described it in these articles. In our previous article we examined how Rome views the Lord's Supper in worship. In this article we want to understand how and why the Reformation was used of God to restore the church to a proper understanding of the Lord's Supper in worship.

Restoration of the gospel

When the Reformation returned the church to the truth of the gospel, everything changed also in worship. In God's sovereign mercy, Martin Luther, who had access to Scripture, began to see the truth of the Word of God. Particularly, he saw that Scripture taught the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross that effectually atoned for the sins of all His people, so that they are justified by an imputed, alien righteousness alone.

He, and all the Reformers after him, saw what is taught in Hebrews 7. The priesthood was fulfilled in Christ who offered Himself the full and final sacrifice, from God's side for us, so that there are to be no more priests offering sacrifices for sin. The entire book of Hebrews is written to early Jewish converts to the faith. These converts were being pressured heavily by their unconverted families and friends to go back to the Jewish system of priests and sacrifices. These family and friends repeatedly said to them, "You need a daily sacrifice as atonement for your sins. Because you sin daily, you need a sacrifice daily. Who are you to think you do not need the priests?" And the book of Hebrews was written to show these converts tempted by this that

Christ is the great Priest to end all priests, and He is the great sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

The Roman Catholic teaching is eerily similar to the Judaism of the time of the book of Hebrews. Hence, Hebrews was written, you could say, also to combat the heresy in the Roman Catholic Church. Both points, about Christ the Priest and Christ the sacrifice, are made in chapter 7. First, by connecting Christ to the priesthood of Melchizedek, the writer shows that the Old Testament prophesied of one priest who was coming who would fulfill and supersede the whole Levitical system. And then, second, Hebrews 7 says, this priest who is priest forever, is both priest and sacrifice. Hebrews 7:27, "Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself."

By doing so, He redeemed us once for all. Christ is the great sacrifice, the spotless Lamb, offered once to bear the sins of many and to pay for them once for all. All of that is finished; there is no more need of sacrifices. We ask for forgiveness daily, and that reality of Christ's sacrifice is applied to our consciences, but the sacrifice itself is over. He really meant it when He said, "It is finished." We are justified by this one sacrifice of Christ alone. Everything necessary for our salvation was finished by Jesus Christ upon the cross. By grace alone, on the basis of the cross alone, you may be assured you are forgiven, now and forever. And God delights to tell His people this.

Restoration of worship

This meant that everything about the worship service

had to change. Now the whole event switched gears. Traffic changed directions. It mainly flowed from His side to ours, with believers only giving response. The Reformers took Ecclesiastes 5:1 seriously, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear [more ready for God to speak to you, and to only respond to Him] than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” (Was this not written to describe the mass? Do not come to the house of God to offer the sacrifice of fools; come to hear God speak to you.) God calls us to the covenantal assembly primarily that, as the sovereign of the covenant, He might speak to us about what He has done and is doing; and when we speak, it is merely to respond in praise for what He says.

The Scriptures then began to be read in the language of the people. Preaching came back to its central position as the voice of God to His people. The sacraments took their rightful place as signs and seals of what is preached, adding nothing new, but functioning as a different way God speaks to His people to assure them. The worship service became a place not where we offered a sacrifice to appease a God vengeful toward His people, but where God speaks of covenant mercies, of His wrath propitiated by His own work on behalf of His dear children, and of a life of gratitude.

Restoration of the Lord's Supper in worship

The Lord's Supper itself was stripped of all the man-made elements and returned to what it was in Scripture. It became a celebration of the finished work of Christ applied to His people. The altar was removed and a table was put in its place. The table was on the ground level, as a sign that God was coming down, condescending to give to His people. The priest was turned into a minister, and he was turned around. No longer was his back to the people, as though he represented the people giving something to God. Rather, he faced the people for he spoke for God to them. In the Supper he showed the once-for-all death of Christ to God's people, and gave them the elements so that they could be assured it was for them. And their part was to receive it by the faith God gives and respond in prayer and praise.

Truths for which to die

Do you see what our heritage is by the sovereign providence of God? People are losing it, in part because they do not know why they have it. Do you see how serious these matters are? People are losing it because they do not know how serious it is. The heart of the gospel was recovered in the Reformation and that

changed everything about worship too, including the element of the Lord's Supper. Rome's is a false gospel. Rome's belongs to a false church. Rome's mass consists of false worship.

And that is the reason why so many were willing to die for rejecting Rome's heresy at the time of the Reformation and beyond. Rome said at the time of the Reformation, and still says, “If anyone denies that in the sacrament...are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ...but saith that He is only in the bread and wine as a sign...let him be anathema.”¹ And they took that anathema seriously at the time of the Reformation, backing it up with steel and fire.

In order to hold on to their power, the Roman Catholic Church and her servants put to death hundreds if not thousands of people for denying Rome's false gospel and holding to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ upon His cross. At the time of Bloody Mary in England over 200 believers were killed, not just for the truth generally, but for this truth about the Lord's Supper. The sixteen-year-old rightful Queen of England (Lady Jane Grey) was beheaded for it. John Rogers, the faithful Calvinist minister, was also killed for it. Rogers was burned at the stake, and this was his crime: denying the real, physical presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper brought down to the earth by the Roman Catholic priest to be re-sacrificed for sin. On the way to the stake Rogers was met by his wife and his eleven children, one an infant in her arms. A painful parting. Yet the record says, “Cheerfully and patiently he continued to Smithfield where he was burnt to ashes in the presence of a great number of people, and his soul ascended to his Redeemer.”²

May God give us such love and zeal for His glory, for His truth, and for His worship.

1 Canons of the Council of Trent. “Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.” Canon 1.

2 Hallihan, CP. *The Authorized Version: A Wonderful and Unfinished History* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2010), 35.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

The woe and blessing of the land

Previous article in this series: May 15, 2019, p. 373.

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Ecclesiastes 10:16, 17

Solomon as the preacher has been describing the way of the fool in his walk, talk, and inability to know the way of wisdom under the sun. That foolishness of man is rooted in the Fall and in the folly and depravity of sin. He turns now to a description of two contrasting states, the one rooted in folly, the other in wisdom.

This contrast comes with woe or blessing upon the land. The land is the earth, viewed from its division into territories or countries. The woe and blessing are not upon the people only but also upon the whole realm or kingdom. The description is, first of all, a general one.

Woe is that which causes distress and grief, which has its source, in earthly terms, in the character of the rulers. The land is not well-governed. The rulers rule for their own pleasure and not for the welfare of the land. The blessing, by contrast, is that which is straight or right, fitted to the need of the land, and therefore works tranquility and happiness, or prosperity under the sun. The land of woe is in decline, and those who should keep it work its destruction. The happy land is flourishing under good governance. Such, in general, is the principle even of the kingdoms of this world seen under the sun.

But we must inquire further. The land of woe has a king who is a child, one who is young, immature, and inexperienced. His princes are self-indulgent rather than wise counsellors. They eat or feast in the morning. As is clear from the end of verse 17, they feast for drunkenness. They drain the kingdom of its riches and increase to profit themselves and not the kingdom. They rule for their own pleasure. The ruler as a child is contrasted with one who is a son of nobles. The idea is not that of European nobility, or of a higher caste of person distinguished from lower classes, but of one of noble character. That is, the

issue is one of maturity, not necessarily of chronological age.

The Spirit by Solomon, prophetically, may well have Solomon's son Rehoboam in view, whose folly with that of his companion princes and their counsel would be part of the occasion for the division of the kingdom. Rehoboam's son, King Abijah, in his confrontation with Jeroboam describes his father at the time of the revolt and division of the kingdom as "young and tenderhearted" (II Chron. 13:7). As Rehoboam was 41 years old when he became king, he was young or a child only in the sense of his immaturity, and tender (like the young shoot of a plant) in heart only by inexperience. To be 41 years old and a child in character is a matter of the foolishness of sin, of pride and self-indulgence, not a matter of age.

It is that immaturity, which ultimately is a spiritual problem in both the childish king and his profligate princes, that is the point at issue. It brings woe upon the land under their rule. The happy land, by contrast, has one who is trained and mature to govern, with princes who are devoted to the needs of the land as a whole. The officials or princes of the prosperous kingdom eat for the proper reason, for strength to labor and not for drunkenness. The land is, therefore, well-governed, in good order, and those over it look to its welfare and that of its citizens. Ultimately, this requires discernment or natural wisdom. The description, therefore, also contains a general truth concerning kingdoms and nations under the sun.

Yet foolishness and wisdom are essentially spiritual realities, and the word spoken in Ecclesiastes was delivered for the church's instruction. What is said, therefore, must be applied not simply to lands in general but to the land, which was Canaan, the land of promise, the type of the kingdom of God. The history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel is the spiritual history of the church of the Old Testament. That history as it is unfolded in Scripture makes clear that the principle stated in these verses would be repeated again and again. Only under

godly kings in Judah would the land have spiritual peace and be genuinely prosperous, as a blessing.

In that connection, Psalm 144 describes the blessings of that typical kingdom in terms of earthly prosperity, as a figure of the spiritual blessings of God's covenant with His people and a godly seed, and is a prayer for those blessings. It concludes, "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD" (Ps. 144:15).

The true blessedness can only come in the way of such spiritual blessings within. In like manner, the Word of God describes the woeful land, the church corrupted, in terms of God's judgment upon a sinful and profligate people: "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable" (Is. 3:4, 5).

Woe and blessing are divine works in God's sovereign government of all things. He sets up childish, self-indulgent rulers in judgment and chastening where there is need for reformation and renewal. In His blessing He gives men of noble character to rule in the life of His church and kingdom. Like the psalmist in Psalm 144, we are earnestly to seek and pray for God's blessing upon His church. When God gives this blessing, we should thank and praise Him for it.

This sovereign government of God in sending woe and blessing is a sobering thought, for what is said of the Old Testament church applies likewise to the New Testament church, to both individual congregations and denominations, as is clear, for example, in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. When the foolishness of sin, of pride, of self-indulgence, and of vanity enter the church, both in the pew and in the councils of the church, God

sends this woe upon the church or congregation. When the church departs in the way of worldliness, spiritual drift in doctrine, or the hypocrisy of Phariseism, He may give His church over to woe in its government, so that the foolish rule in the church. Many a denomination, through its departure from the Word, has been given over to the rule of the hireling, to men-pleasers as elders, sustained by a people with itching ears. Folly begins to pervade the life of the church, so that the rulers as fools and therefore the parishioners, also foolish, labor and walk in vanity. The preacher has just said in the preceding verse, "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city" (Eccl. 10:15). When that city is the heavenly city of God, of which the church in the world is an imperfect manifestation, the matter is spiritually destructive.

There is a reason why the apostle in Acts 20:28 says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The order is important. First take heed "unto yourselves," the pastors and elders, then "and to all the flock." The reason given in verses 29-31 is the threat of spiritual corruption from within and without. It is God's church. He bought it, He keeps it. Faithful rule in wisdom is the rule of Christ the noble King of the church over His blood-bought flock. Those who rule under Him are to be spiritually the sons of nobles and princes who eat for strength and not drunkenness, who serve the King of the church and seek the welfare of the flock. Blessed and happy is such a church, such a congregation, such a denomination—the land. "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD" (Ps. 144:15). There God commands the blessings of His covenant.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Richard Smit, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

The Confession of the Guanabara Bay martyrs (1558) 1

The history of the spread of the Reformed faith in the sixteenth century during the early and difficult decades of the Protestant Reformation is always interesting, especially in connection with the work of Reformed churches in missions. Since the Reformed faith, with its doctrines of sovereign particular grace and double

predestination, is often maligned as uninterested in and unable to do world missions, it is encouraging to see from the Lord's work through His church examples that show that this accusation from enemies of the Reformed faith is historically unfounded. One example of this is found in the history of the French Huguenots

(Calvinists) for freedom of religion and for a livelihood (commercial trade), who attempted to settle in South America, in the area that is known today as the large city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.¹

The Reformation's spread through Roman Catholic France by the mid-sixteenth century had resulted in many converts from all levels of French society. Even in the French armed forces, there were conversions from Roman Catholicism to the Reformed faith. Among the converts in the French armed forces was Admiral Gaspard Coligny, who was converted to the Reformed faith by 1550.

Understanding the increasing difficulty for the Huguenots to live and to work in Roman Catholic France, Admiral Coligny proposed to King Henry II that a French expedition be sent to Brazil, which was already being colonized by the Portuguese. For the Admiral, the purpose was to establish a French settlement in that area for the religious freedom of the French Huguenots. The French king liked the idea of expanding his empire into South America for increased trading opportunities and increased wealth, and was just as happy to have a place far away from France to which French Huguenots could be sent.

In 1555, Admiral Coligny sponsored the first group of two ships with 600 colonists and soldiers. The first settlement expedition was placed under the authority of captain Nicolas Villegagnon, a Roman Catholic. Among the colonists were a large majority of French Calvinists from Geneva, Switzerland, and La Rochelle, France. Later in 1555, the expedition arrived at Guanabara Bay and settled on one of the islands in the bay. The island was named "Villegagnon Island" in honor of the expedition's captain, and the fort was named after Admiral Coligny, who sponsored not only the first settlement expedition but also the second one.

In 1557, at the request of Captain Villegagnon and with the sponsorship of Admiral Coligny, a second expedition arrived with a replenishment of 300 more colonists. On the three ships that set sail in March 1557 for Guanabara Bay, the settlers included fourteen men sent by the church in Geneva at the time John Calvin was serving as pastor. In fact, one of those men was Calvinist theologian Pierre Richier. With him, ten young men were sent to serve as translators for preaching, instruction, and Bible translation among the Tamoio and Tupinamba tribes. Thus, the Reformed church in Geneva sent ordained men and workers to establish a Reformed

congregation in Guanabara Bay among the settlers as well as to engage in foreign mission work on the mainland.

With the arrival of the second wave of colonists, there was optimism regarding the establishment of a Reformed church and mission among the natives. However, this happy situation ended after heated, doctrinal disputes arose between the Calvinists and the Roman Catholics. As a result of the disputes, Captain Villegagnon ordered the Huguenots off the island in October 1557 onto the mainland around Guanabara Bay. For a little while, the Huguenots managed to survive on the mainland away from Fort Coligny. However, by January 1558 it became clear that the Huguenots could not endure the hardships and maintain their beachhead on the mainland. Thus, all the surviving Huguenots were ordered by the captain to return to France. One of the returning settlers included Jean de Lery, who published an interesting book about this history shortly after his repatriation.²

The doctrinal dispute eventually led to the execution of four Huguenots in early 1558. The four French Huguenots who were executed for the Reformed faith were Jean du Bourdel, Matthieu Verneuil, Pierre Bourdon, and Andre la Fon. These men had been arrested by Captain Villegagnon, a Roman Catholic, for their opposition to the false doctrine of the eucharist, namely transubstantiation. In order to determine the punishment of these men and possibly to give them an opportunity to recant their Reformed convictions, the captain ordered the four prisoners to answer a number of his questions about Roman Catholic doctrine. Although realizing that their confession would be most likely their death warrant, the men did not waver in their answers. In fact, within twelve hours after receiving and reading the answers, the captain ordered that the men be hung. What they wrote and then sealed in their death is known as the Guanabara Confession.³

As mentioned earlier, the captain had ordered all of the Huguenots back to France in January 1558. When a few men refused to leave the island and board the ships for the long voyage back to France, they were subsequently executed by drowning. They were executed not so much because they did not follow the captain's orders but because they would not recant the Reformed

1 For a full historical account about the French Huguenots in Brazil, read John Gillies, *The Martyrs of Guanabara* (Moody Press, 1976).

2 Jean de Lery, *A Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, translated by Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

3 An English translation of the Guanabara Confession (1558) can be found at the website of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland: www.cprf.co.uk/articles/guanabaraconfession.htm

faith and revert to Roman Catholicism, a condition for remaining at the French settlement. With their deaths and the voyage of the remaining Huguenots back to France in 1558, this attempt by Admiral Coligny with the French and Genevan Reformed churches to settle and establish Reformed churches and foreign missions in South America had come to an end.

In the next article, we will consider some highlights of the Guanabara Confession and some points of significance of this part of Reformed church history. In the meantime, please read the Guanabara confession.



Dordt 400: Memorial stones

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

The Synod of Dordt (11) The *Post-Acta* sessions

...These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.—Joshua 4:7c

Sessions 155-180 of the Synod of Dordt, held from May 13 to 29, 1619, constituted the Synod's fourth and final phase. These are called the *Post-Acta* sessions because they were held after the Synod had finished its primary business (judging the Remonstrants and drafting the Canons) and after the foreign delegates had left. In Dutch versions of the *Acts of Synod*, the minutes of these sessions are found in the very back of the book, following all of the judgments relating to the Remonstrant matter that the various delegations had submitted. Because the foreign delegates had left, the *Post-Acta* sessions were conducted in Dutch rather than Latin.

During these sessions the delegates treated matters that pertained to the Dutch churches in common. The provincial synods had forwarded more than nineteen overtures ("gravamen") to the Synod of Dordt, most dealing with church political issues. Synod drew up responses to these overtures, and incorporated them into the existing church order of that day, resulting in the Church Order of Dordt. During these sessions Synod also:

- drew up the Formula of Subscription.
- asked the provincial governments to adopt certain regulations regarding the theological education provided by the universities.
- asked the provincial governments to adopt other regulations regarding the education of children.

- approved regulations regarding the proper view of and keeping of the Sabbath.
- approved the Dutch translation of the Canons.
- approved a standard edition of the French (Gallic) Confession and the Belgic Confession in the Dutch, French, and Latin languages.
- approved the form to use when administering adult baptism.
- treated the appeal of Isaac Welsing regarding a decision of the provincial Synod of North Holland by which he was deprived of his office.
- made provision for the calling of the next national synod, which was to be held in 1621 (but never was).
- made provision for the revision and examination of the official *Acts of Synod*.

On Wednesday, May 29, the Synod concluded its work by gathering in Dordrecht's Great Church to hear a sermon on Isaiah 121:1-3. Returning to its usual meeting place (the *Kloveniersdoelen*), the president of the delegation from the States General led in closing ceremony.

At long last the delegates could return home to their churches and families from whom they had been separated for over six months. The "great synod" was over.



Strength of youth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa

Male sexuality

In previous articles on the subject of biblical masculinity I have set forth some of the basic truths about what it means to be man. Now I want to apply those principles to some of the different relationships and circumstances in which a man must show himself to be a man.

The first is in the sphere of his sexuality. I treat this first because it is in this area that the man of God faces one of the most serious threats, if not the most serious threat, to his manhood today. The devil and the world are making an all-out assault upon the Christian man by tempting him with a polluted, perverted sexuality. This makes it urgent that we address the sanctified sexuality of the godly man.

Naked and not ashamed

It is easy to think that male sexuality is inherently depraved. When we consider the sexual filth promoted by the world and our own struggles with sexual sin, we assume that there is only one conclusion: our sexual natures are intrinsically evil.

But this is not true. Our sexual natures are not a consequence of the Fall, as if Adam received a sexual nature only after he ate of the forbidden fruit. In the beginning God made Adam (and then Eve) with a sexual nature. This is implied in the Bible when it says, "...male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). This is made explicit later when we read of God joining Adam and Eve together in the first marriage: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). One aspect of Adam's being fearfully and wonderfully made is that he possessed a sexual nature with a sex drive, and this is something over which the Creator declared: "It [is] very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Even after the fall into sin, the Bible does not condemn sexuality as such. Rather, it is celebrated in its proper place. In Proverbs 5 a father urges his son, "Drink waters out of thine own cistern" (v. 15) and, "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth...let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love" (vv. 18-19). Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the marriage bed undefiled." All one has to do is read

the book of Song of Solomon to see that having a sexual nature is not something inherently shameful.

This means that the Christian young man does not have to be ashamed of his sexuality, as if it is some disgusting disease with which he is contaminated. He does not have to be embarrassed that he feels an attraction to a Christian young woman, that he expresses a desire to date and to marry.

Many strong men slain

Though our sexuality is not inherently sinful, that sexual nature now after the Fall is so often directed into sinful channels. Rather than being expressed in a holy, God-glorifying manner, it is pressed into the service of sin and self.

This was the case with Adam. After he ate of the fruit, the first thing we read afterwards is the perversion of his sexual nature: "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3:7). Adam's sexual nature was pressed into the service of sin.

And the same is true for us as redeemed men of God. So often our sexual natures are expressed sinfully. One of the ways that this often shows itself is in a kind of hyper-sexuality. According to certain experts, men think about sex every seven seconds. I am not convinced that is true of every man, but the point is that men think about sex. A lot. And too often their thinking and desiring is not sanctified.

We do not receive any help from the world. The world—and the devil working behind the scenes—is doing all it can to further promote sexual sin among Christian men. Their corrupt sexual ethic confronts us at every turn. Seemingly, wherever we go and wherever we look we are bombarded with things designed to stir up sinful, sexual lusts.

Some of the worst culprits are the movies and TV shows of the world, easily accessible today through streaming services such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, Hulu, and so on. If the advertisements are any indication, for any movie or show to be successful it has to

have a steady stream of sexual scenes. I am told that one of the most popular series (*Game of Thrones*) is filled with every kind of sexual perversity. Watching these things does nothing to promote holy sexuality in the man of God.

Some of the other culprits are the books, magazines, and music of the world. Much of the literature written today includes explicit descriptions of sexual sin that are intended to arouse. It is no surprise that one of the most popular book series of late (*50 Shades of Grey*) is a celebration of sexual sin. The magazine racks at the grocery store are filled with glossy covers promoting fornication. Almost every genre of music (yes, country music included) promotes the world's ideal of "love," which is nothing but selfish lust.

And then there is the tremendous evil of pornography. Many books could be written about this important subject, but in the little space here I want to mention just a few key points.

Pornography is a powerful temptation for men. This is not to say that it is only a temptation for men and not for women; there are many women who struggle with pornography as well. But it is an evil that has a powerful pull on men. Perhaps this is the case because men are, generally speaking, very visual. But whatever the reason, there is no denying that this is a grave threat to men. If the statistics can be believed (and there is no reason to think that they can not be), then many Christian men are ensnared in this awful bondage.

Part of the danger of pornography today is the fact that it is so easily accessible. When our fathers and grandfathers were growing up, they had to go to quite some lengths to get their hands on a *Playboy* magazine. But today those same images are just a click or swipe away. From the privacy of one's bedroom or car, he can use his phone to access an endless supply of pornographic images and videos.

The effect of such an enslavement to pornography on the minds of men is terrifying. Studies have shown that pornography addiction has an effect on the makeup of a man's mind. The use of pornography desensitizes him. Having indulged in these things so often, what used to bother him no longer does. The use of pornography affects the way he thinks about beauty. Beauty is the sum total of a woman's physical characteristics. The use of pornography affects his view of women. They become merely sex objects meant for his sexual gratification. With a conscience so seared, he may demand of women that they do the things he has seen the women on the Internet do.

If there happens to be a red-blooded man out there who thinks this is not a grave threat to his soul, let him meditate on these words: "For she hath cast down many

wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her" (Prov. 7:26).

Not once named

The calling for men is that they channel their sexual natures within the bounds that God has set in His Word. This means that the married man will direct the whole of his sexuality—including both body and mind—toward his wife. And this means for the single man that he will refrain from all sexual activity. God wills that all of his sons either enter into marriage as virgins or live their whole life as a virgin. The single man will not only preserve his virginity, but he will also avoid anything that may lead to or arouse sexual sin.

The calling of the Word of God to single men can be put simply: "Flee fornication" (I Cor. 6:18a). Do not in pride think that you can stand up to these temptations without falling. Allowing yourself to remain in tempting situations only feeds your old man and makes him stronger. The way of conquering these temptations is by cowardice. You turn and you run from anything that is remotely connected to sexual sin.

Lest the single man think this to be too strict, be reminded of the powerful Word of God in Ephesian 5:3: "But fornication, and all uncleanness...let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints." The idea is not that we may not talk about these sins so that they are never mentioned. The point is that these sins should be so far removed from us that there is not even the suspicion of committing them.

It is important that we say something here about what is a sensitive and oft-neglected subject: masturbation, that is, sexual gratification of self.

There are many, including some Christians, who say that masturbation is legitimate for the unmarried man (and even for the married man). They say it is a purely natural and physical act, a harmless activity without serious repercussions. They claim that it is even a necessary activity in order for the man to have relief of sexual tension. They argue that to forbid this as sin is only to heap unnecessary guilt on the man who does so.

The truth of the matter is that this is sin. For one thing, it is the height of ignorance to argue that this is a purely physical act. I have an extremely difficult time imagining a man engaging in this activity without his mind being filled with thoughts and images of a woman. And for the single man, this means he is engaging in a sexual activity in his mind with a woman who is not his wife. This is sin.

In addition, masturbation is sin because it is an act of selfishness. The world views sex in terms of self-gratification. But the Word of God teaches something far dif-

ferent. According to the Bible, sexual activity is an act of selfless giving to one's spouse. "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence [give conjugal rights]; and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife" (I Cor. 7:3-4). Masturbation is self-sex, and its focus is purely selfish. This is sin.

Let the man of God confess this sin before God and seek forgiveness. And let him hear again the Word of God calling him to sexual purity: Let sexual sin not be once named among you!

In all points tempted

In this important area of biblical manhood, it is important that we look to the Son of Man, the man Christ Jesus. By this I do not mean that we look to Jesus merely as an example to follow, even though He is our

example of true manhood. We look to Him in faith as our Savior.

How comforting it is to know: "[W]e have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He was tempted in all points like as we are! Including sexual temptations! He knows the struggles we men have in this regard. And thus he is able to help us: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor [help] them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

Young men, remember that in Christ there is forgiveness for sin, including the shameful, sexual sins that we have committed. And remember that in Him there is the strength and grace daily to fight against these temptations. As powerful as the sexual temptations are, their power is nothing compared to the power of the cross of our Savior.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Where is the Senior Retreat this summer? Answer later in this column.

Evangelism activities

Calvary PRC of Hull, IA, in conjunction with the Domestic Mission Committee of the PRCA, invited area residents to attend a special mission presentation by our home missionary, Rev. Aud Spriensma, in their sanctuary on Sunday, June 16. The title of his presentation was: "Our Home Missions: Reaching the Nones and the Dones." Refreshments followed the presentation.

The Evangelism Committee of Grace PRC in Michigan invited the congregation to a speech by Prof. B. Gritters after their worship service on May 26. The speech was entitled "You Are My Witnesses." Their bulletin notice stated, "As a committee, we are excited to be able to learn as a church body about how to create a culture of evangelism within our own congregation." Refreshments were served after the speech.

Minister activities

Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada announced a new trio of Revs. M. McGeown, C. Spronk, and M. VanderWal. Rev. Clay Spronk received their call. On May 26 Rev. Spronk announced he had been led by God to decline this call. May God continue to bless the congregation at Immanuel and provide their next under-shepherd in His good time.

Southeast PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) announced a trio of Rev. B. Huizinga (Hope PRC-Redlands, CA), Rev. R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace PRC-Spokane, WA) and Rev. J. Mahtani (Cornerstone PRC-St. John, IN). Rev. Huizinga received this call on May 19. On June 2 he declined it. Southeast PRC Council then announced a new trio: Revs. R. Kleyn, D. Lee, and J. Mahtani. On June 16, Rev. R. Kleyn received the congregation's majority vote.

Young people's activities

The young people of Byron Center, MI PRC made a trip to Pittsburgh on June 7-10, where they participated in a work-bee day and a time of fellowship and worship.

On Saturday, June 29, the Byron Center PRC Young People held a Car Wash/Bake Sale at the church. Many delicious homemade baked goods were available for purchase. All were encouraged to “relax, visit and enjoy free refreshments while we get your car sparkling clean!”

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia invite any young people and young adults aged 13 and up to their biennial youth camp. This youth camp will be held in Brisbane from December 28, 2019 – January 3, 2020. Rev. Martyn McGeown from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship of the Republic of Ireland will be the guest speaker. This is a great time to meet other young people, fellowship with them, and learn about our Savior. Please contact Megan at meggyhiggs@gmail.com for a flyer or for additional information.

School activities

From the bulletin in Loveland, CO PRC: “Rowes Flowers and the Fundraisers are asking for 24 volunteers to help deliver flowers Thursday, May 9, Friday, May 10, and Saturday, May 11. Spend a lovely day delivering stunning flowers to deserving moms while raising money for our school.”

Also from Loveland’s bulletin:

At the special School Society meeting the proposal to purchase the property located at 1118 E 57th Street for future expansion needs and additional monies needed for further development passed overwhelmingly. The Board is grateful for the good membership turnout at the meeting and humbled by the show of gratitude and support for the Board’s labors. We also stand in amazement each month with the generous monetary support for this cause from our congregation as well as from our brothers and sisters in the Lord abroad. To God be the glory!

Denominational activities

A pre-synodical service was held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. in First PRC of Grand Rapids. Rev. R. Van Overloop preached the sermon. Synod began its 2019 meetings on June 11, at 8 A.M. in the First PR Church of Grand Rapids. Seminary graduation took place on Thursday, June 13 in First Church, at 7:30 P.M., with Prof. R. Dykstra giving the address from I Timothy 4:16.

The Theological School Committee put forward an aggregate of pastors to Synod, one of which was to be called by Synod to replace Prof. R. Cammenga: Rev. J. Engelsma, Rev. C. Griess, Rev. B. Huizinga, and Rev. R. Kleyn. Rev. B. Huizinga has received this call. As churches, we offer our fervent prayers for him and his family as he considers this weighty call.

Mission activities

The Foreign Mission Committee of the PRCA meets the third Tuesday of each month in the Hull, IA PRC. Members are made up of the five Siouxland area churches. In addition to the work of the night, the committee has been discussing the book *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* by J.H. Bavinck. One chapter is discussed each meeting. Noteworthy is his definition of missions:

Missions is that activity of the church—in essence it is nothing else than an activity of Christ, exercised through the church—through which the church, in this interim period, in which the end is postponed, calls the peoples of the earth to repentance and to faith in Christ, so that they may be made His disciples and through baptism be incorporated into the fellowship of those who await the coming of the kingdom [p. 62].

From the bulletin of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship of Ireland:

Pastor and Larisa leave tomorrow (Monday 27 May) for the USA. They will visit Loveland, CO; Hull, IA; and Grand Rapids, MI (and Pastor will preach in Loveland, Hull, Doon, and Holland PR churches). Pastor will also attend the PRC Synod in Grand Rapids, MI, which begins on Tuesday 11 June. Pastor and Larisa plan to arrive back in Ireland on Friday 21 June. While they are in the USA, Rev. Justin Smidstra (Holland, MI) and Rev. Angus Stewart will supply the pulpit here.

Congregational activities

At an informational meeting in May, 42 families and 7 individuals from Byron Center, MI congregation signed up as a daughter church to begin worship services at Zion Christian School on July 7.

We express congratulations to Professor and Mrs. Herman Hanko on the occasion of their 66th wedding anniversary on May 27.

Senior activities/trivia answer

The Senior Retreat registration is open. The dates are September 17-20, at Gull Lake Ministries in Hickory Corners, MI. The theme is “God’s Care For Us.” Forms are available at zionprc.org. Click on “Senior Retreat.” More trivia next time.

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

Announcements

Wedding anniversary

With thanks to our heavenly Father, we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of **Neal and Joyce Pastoor** who were married at First Protestant Reformed Church on July 17, 1959. Much has changed since that day, but God's covenant promises remain the same. How thankful we are for their godly marriage and for their example of faithfulness to Christ and His church. "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.... The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25:10, 14).

Rev. Carl and Mary Haak

Mark and Bethany Feenstra (Sarita [in glory],
Cornelius, Adam, and Marcus)

Rev. Jonathan and Keri Mahtani (Levi, Shane,
Mayla, Ezra, Lyndi, and Tressa)

Chad and Melanie Noorman (Lucas, Zoe,
Gwennan, and Carly)

Everett and Linda Buitert

Everett
Charles

Jane Woudenberg

Charles and Jennifer Pastoor

Catherine, Ella, Isabel, Miles, and William
Jenison, Michigan

Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* is published only once during the summer months: June, July, and August.

Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Calvary PRC, on Wednesday, September 25, 2019, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 26, 2019. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Calvary's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 2019, at 8:00 A.M., in the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 12, 2019.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

Notification of candidacy

All Protestant Reformed congregations are hereby informed that the 2019 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America has declared Mr. Matt Kortus and Mr. Jacob Maatman candidates for the gospel ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The candidates will be eligible for a call on or after July 13, 2019.

Mr. Kortus' address is:

7776 Hollyhock Ave.

Jenison, MI 49428

Phone: (970) 402-4300

Email: mgkortus@gmail.com

Mr. Maatman's address is:

1194 Beechwood Dr.

Jenison, Michigan 49428

Phone: (708) 829-4204

Email: jtmaatman@att.net

Rev. Ron VanOverloop, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Cory Griess

- | | |
|---------|---|
| July 7 | "Uncondiitonal Election (2)" John 6:35 |
| July 14 | "Limited Atonement (1)" John 10:15 |
| July 21 | "Limited Atonement (2)" I John 4:10; Gal. 3:31; Rom. 5:10 |
| July 28 | "Total Depravity" John 6:44, 65-66 |