

The Standard Bearer

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Nurturing God's olive plants

Rev. Michael DeVries

The marks of the true church applied, or, At the point of the wedge

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REFORMED
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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Nurturing God's olive plants

"... thy children like olive plants round about thy table."
Psalm 128:3b

As Reformed believers, we know how tremendously significant the institution of the family is in the church and kingdom of God. We know and believe that God, from the beginning to the end of time, is pleased to continue His covenant from generation to generation with believers and their children. The faithful church will continue, by the grace of God, in the way of each succeeding generation fulfilling its covenant obligation to raise up a godly seed.

From the time of the Fall of our first parents into sin under the instigation of the devil the institution of the family has been under attack. Today we witness increasing immorality, the multitude of broken homes, and the often despised, destitute, and delinquent children brought forth by the world of the ungodly. We also realize that we are not immune from these attacks on the family.

In Psalm 128 we see the blessedness of family life lived in the fear of the Lord. That is the key, the crucial thing—the fear of the Lord! "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD..." (v. 1). It is not by having a larger income, not by having a wife who can feel "fulfilled" with a career outside the home, not by avoiding having children so that your lifestyle is not hindered from making you happy. It is fearing Jehovah, walking in His ways, that brings real happiness and true blessedness.

And in the fear of the Lord there is the rich blessing of having a wife and children. This is not to say that the blessing of God is not upon the house of the godly couple who have been given no children, or upon the house of those saints whom the Lord leads in the way of single life. These also have their vital place and calling in the fellowship of the church. But the general rule is that God gives unto husband and wife children, children who must be brought up in the fear of His name. We are called to nurture the olive plants that God has placed around our tables.

Olive plants are young, vulnerable plants, small saplings that in time become olive trees. We desire that our

children be straight, healthy, and strong, sucking in the sap of their godly upbringing and education. Ultimately, our covenant children are God's; they are His olive plants. That is the seriousness of our calling to nurture them. That is what Jehovah Himself says about the children of His covenant people in Ezekiel 16:20, 21. Rebuking Jerusalem for their enormous wickedness of sacrificing their children to idols, God says, "Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and daughters, whom thou hast borne *unto me*, and these hast thou sacrificed. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain *my children*?"

God's olive plants must be nurtured, that is, spiritually fed, nourished, trained up, and cultivated. Because the children are God's, they must be brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). They must be "piously and religiously educated," according to our Baptism Form. God's children must be brought up in the fear of the Lord; they must be led in His ways. This instruction is essential, for God uses it to train up His olive plants to godliness, to spiritual maturity as olive trees.

This required instruction includes all of the education and schooling our children receive. That is plain from all the commands of God to teach our children. Those commands are all-embracing and all-comprehensive. We may not exclude any part of our children's education from that. God's claim on our children, His olive plants, is total! If anything, God claims their minds. We are to nurture them so that they love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. After all, the life of the child is one life, a unity. And that one life is to be nurtured by the Word of God. Scripture must be the basis, content, and rule of all the instruction, not only of a certain spiritual part involving the church.

This instruction is ultimately the responsibility of parents. Extended family, friends, and fellow saints of the covenant will support the work. Godly teachers will assist us. But the parents have the calling: "And ye fathers...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The establishment and maintenance

nance of a good Christian school honors this reality. It is an extension of the covenant home. It is parental; the teachers stand in the place of the parents. But the home is basic, fundamental to all the nurturing of God's olive plants. The Christian school cannot rise higher than the homes of the students. That means that we must do all within our power to make our homes what they should be.

We must work diligently so that we have good, strong marriages. A loving relationship between husband and wife contributes much to the nurturing of children. Then the whole atmosphere of the home is one of trust, understanding, and caring for one another. When father and mother sincerely pray and zealously strive to conform their lives to God's Word, the children learn to do this. By word and example, the tender souls of God's olive plants are nurtured. This includes carefully defining our roles and responsibilities as God wants us to do this. God instructs the husband to be the loving head of his wife and the wife to lovingly honor and submit unto her husband. We see this from Psalm 128, where the Lord's blessing is upon the man that fears the Lord, and his wife is as a fruitful vine by the sides of his house.

We must endeavor to create a spiritual environment in our homes. That is more than merely setting aside a brief time for spiritual, religious activities such as our meal-time devotions. On the one hand, I would emphasize how vital it is that we have regular, edifying family devotions. After all, our children are to be "like olive plants round about thy table." That family fellowship with each other and with the Lord is at the heart of family life! Reading and discussing Scripture, singing, praying together as a family every day is a necessity. We may not let social media, sports, work, socializing with friends, or other activities destroy the family altar around the table!

Yet, on the other hand, a spiritual environment includes our awareness that actions speak louder than words to our children. We must in all of our life be God-fearing if we expect our children to be. We then strive to provide both positive and negative motivation to our children. All of Scripture emphasizes that true love is manifest in admonition, chastening, and discipline. Undisciplined children grow up to be lawless, evil characters—think of the example of Eli's sons. So we must discipline properly. We must evaluate our discipline. Does it hurt us more than the child? If not, we may be guilty of venting our frustration or anger on the child. Do we discipline our children so that they feel the displeasure of *God* more than ours? And are they aware of this because we lovingly explain it to them?

But there is also the positive side—edifying words of encouragement sometimes avoid the sorry consequences of sin. Olive plants need much TLC—tender, loving care! It always seems easier to criticize than to encourage. Positive reinforcement is assuring them that when they do right and well, God approves and His grace is magnified.

Finally, in the process of nurturing God's olive plants we must strive to be consistent. Paul warns fathers, "Provoke not your children to wrath" (Eph. 6:4). We easily do this when we punish our children according to our moods, sometimes more severely than they deserve, sometimes not at all when they should be. We must be consistent in passing on proper spiritual values to our children: reverence for the Word of God, love for God and our neighbor, honor for the law of God in every area of life, and striving to do all things to the glory of God.

The danger is great that we forget or ignore the principle of the fundamental importance of the home in the nurturing of God's olive plants. If that is the case, we think of the nurturing of our children as something that automatically happens to them as they enter the Christian school building. Perhaps we tend to think this is roughly comparable to the manufacture of vehicles in a factory. We insert a child into the process at age five; certain fixed operations are performed upon him at various stations along the way. And after thirteen years or so he emerges fully educated and equipped to enter the real world. If the result is unsatisfactory, we can complain about the decline of quality control. However, we know that in the nurturing of God's olive plants there are no recalls and no refunds.

But in this way of thinking of the education of our children we make a serious mistake. A car is manufactured entirely in a factory, but learning takes place in many different places—home, church, school, at work, and wherever else a person is. In addition, there is a point at which the process is finished and the car rolls off the assembly line, but education continues throughout a person's lifetime. With a car, the factory does the whole operation, but the Christian school is only a part of the process of nurturing our children. And, we forget that we may be letting the world educate our children, maybe for several hours a day, by means of the Internet, social media, or television. Perhaps we have allowed our children to associate with improper, unbelieving friends. We must remember that the school provides only a small part of the total nurturing, however important that part may be.

Another great danger involved in this nurturing of God's olive plants is that we develop an increasing ac-

ceptance and tolerance of sin. On the one hand, we can easily become insensitive to sin. The Internet, social media, and television display with approval and laughter the corruption and rebellion of the world of sin. Constant exposure to sin makes us increasingly insensitive to it. After a while, sin is no longer seen to be very sinful. And on the other hand, we sometimes seem to find it easy to make and accept explanations (really excuses) for sin. Evil speech, cruelty to others, disobedience, disrespect for authority—such things can be excused with a shrug of the shoulders and a comment that “It’s only natural for a girl to try to get approval from her peers,” or “Boys just naturally act that way.” We console ourselves in the thought that, after all, everybody does it. We must increase our sensitivity to sin—in our homes, at school, in all of life. We must avoid exposure to it and learn to react against it when we do encounter it. We must treat it as the grievous evil it is, also by the proper discipline of God’s olive plants.

Nurturing God’s olive plants is no easy task, not in our homes nor in our Christian schools, which are again opening their doors for another school year. Maintaining a good Christian school is costly and difficult work.

There are struggles, problems, and disappointments. Parents, teachers, board members, and the whole covenant community need to be encouraged.

We certainly may be encouraged by the Lord’s blessing upon our feeble efforts. Deuteronomy 6 assures us that God’s olive plants learn to know Him and love Him. Psalm 78 confirms that they will set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep His commandments. The concluding verses of Psalm 128 encourage us greatly: “The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”

God does truly bless the nurturing of His olive plants by giving us, according to His will, young men and young women who hold high in confession and walk the glorious banner of our Lord Jesus Christ. By God’s grace they will carry on after us the cause of God and His truth in the midst of this world. May that assurance of His blessing encourage and inspire us unto renewed zeal in carrying out the vital task of nurturing God’s olive plants!



Editorial

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

The marks of the true church applied, or, At the point of the wedge

Previous article in this series: August 2018, p. 437.

Where is the true church to be found? The Reformed church confesses that the true church can be identified by three notable marks, namely, the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and the proper exercise of church discipline. It was necessary for the church of the Reformation to set forth these marks in order that the true church of Christ be distinguished from the false, that is, Rome, as well as from various groups that had separated from the Reformation, such as radicals. There is no indication that the Reformed (Belgic) Confession of Faith was labeling the Lutherans as the false church, even though significant doctrinal differences separated the Reformed from the Lutheran churches.

The question remains for Reformed believers living over 450 years later: how should we apply Article 29 of the Confession to the church situation today? Across the globe are thousands upon thousands of Christian churches and denominations. Is it possible to identify the true church? Believers *must* be able, else they will not know to what church they must join themselves. To that application of these marks we turn.

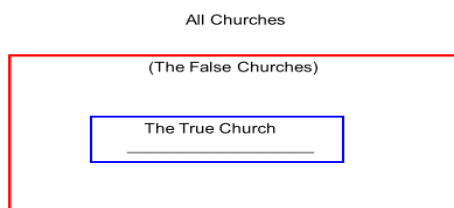
Note first, that, properly considered, these marks apply to a local congregation rather than to a denomination. Only a local congregation can preach, administer sacraments, and exercise Christian discipline. That is why, in an apostatizing denomination there can yet be individual congregations that manifest these marks quite clearly. Whether such congregations ought to re-

main in an apostatizing denomination is another question. But the point is, that the marks are found in the *congregation*. However, that being true, insofar as the congregations of a denomination are in harmony as regards their preaching and practice, the marks can be applied to a denomination.

One only true church?

One way that these marks are often misapplied is by selecting one denomination and identifying it as the true church, and then rejecting all others as false church. Virtually every church has members who consider their church to be the true church, and then draw the “logical” conclusion that all others are false. (See figure 1)

Figure 1



This is a wrong application of the Confession’s standards. That this is wrong is obvious from the fact that the Confession gives marks, not names. It did not identify the Reformed churches of the Netherlands as the true church. It did not identify the Lutheran churches as true or false. It did not even name Rome, though the description of the false church makes clear that Rome is false church. It is clear that the Confession was not interested in identifying one specific church as the true one.

Yet there is a more important reason why this is a false application. Recall the attributes of the church of Jesus Christ. She is a catholic or universal church. Jesus’ church is not limited to thirty-four congregations in the United States and Canada. She is not limited to 500 congregations in the United States and Canada. The true church of Jesus is gathered out of the *nations*. No church in the world can claim to be THE true church of Jesus and all the rest false, because no church is truly universal.

Nor is it correct in a given country to limit the true church to one denomination, for the simple reason that outside the church there is no salvation. If someone would limit the true church of Christ to the Protestant Reformed Churches, for example, he would at the same time be maintaining that currently there are no saved people in Detroit, in Omaha, in Lexington, or in Houston, that is to say, in any city where a Protestant Reformed Church was not found. And anyone in Grand Rapids who is not Protestant Reformed is not saved. That is preposterous.

Therefore, we reject—emphatically reject—the idea

that any one denomination or congregation can be identified as *the* true church, and all the rest rejected as false. The Confession itself does not allow it. We insist that one can identify the true church, but that does not involve singling out one particular church as *the* (only) true church.

All churches are equally true?

The other extreme is also contrary to the Confession, namely, that all churches that take the name Christian are to be considered equally as true church. This is popular today. When I was a boy, the back of the Saturday newspaper carried notices of church services all over the Grand Rapids area, with the urging, “Go to the church of your choice.” Later they added, “or synagogue.” The thinking manifest by this, which continues today, is that it really does not matter which church you attend. No one has a corner on the truth. No one may judge others for their beliefs. None can see the heart and judge sincerity. Therefore, it does not matter. All churches are equally legitimate avenues leading to heaven.

That all churches may be considered true churches flatly contradicts the teaching of the Confession, and of the Bible. Jesus warned against those who called Him “Lord, Lord” but did not follow what He taught (Luke 6:46-49). This is also exemplified in the church that dares to take the name of Christ as hers, but does not teach His Word. The believer must evaluate the preaching in particular, as well as the administration of the sacraments and church discipline. This evaluation is not seeking to identify Christians and non-Christians. Rather, it is identifying the church where one must be a member. Do not lose sight of this. The goal of the Confession is not that one can smugly identify the false church and condemn it. The goal is rather that believers are able to distinguish the true church from the false in order to guide them to *join* the true. With that goal in view, the Confession clearly rejects the idea that all churches named Christian may be viewed as satisfactory options for believers to join.

The church as wedge

The proper way to apply the marks of the Confession is to recognize that the true church of Jesus Christ is best described as a wedge.¹ (See figure 2) Within this

¹ The figure of a wedge is not original with me. I heard it first as a student in a seminary commencement address in 1983 by the late Homer C. Hoeksema. He taught this in seminary, and I have since used the illustration in my instruction. His fine speech (“At the Point of the Wedge”) was printed in the *Standard Bearer*, and can be found in the July 1, 1983 issue, vol. 59, pp. 415ff. (www.

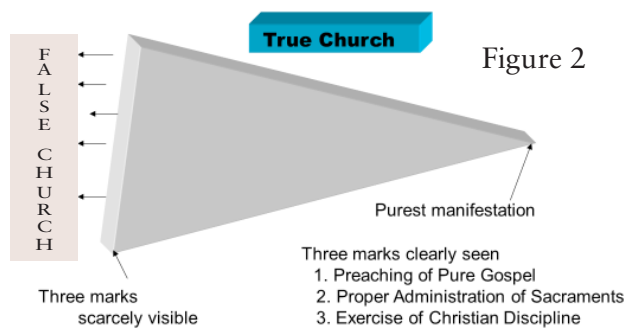


Figure 2

“wedge” are a variety of churches, but one thing surely characterizes them—they are committed to the Bible. They maintain that the Bible is God’s Word. They may have wrong interpretations of that Word; they may have glaring inconsistencies in their theology, allowing truth and error to exist side by side. Worship might not be as pure as it ought. Members might not even recognize that the teachings in the church’s theology conflict. But they are genuinely committed to maintain the truth of the Bible.

However, just as a wedge (like one that is used to split a log) has a sharp edge and a dull side, so likewise the true church has a sharp edge and a dull side. At the sharp edge, the marks are clearly visible. The church represented by this edge preaches the pure doctrine of the gospel, properly administers the sacraments, and rightly exercises discipline.

Moving away from that sharp edge, the marks become less distinct. Errors are tolerated in the preaching—not the cardinal truths of the Trinity or the Incarnation, and the like, but departures from the truth of Scripture. Such departures might be official decisions adopting error, but more often errors are preached and are not condemned and rejected.

As one moves to the dull side, the marks are present, but badly corrupted. The churches represented by this side are apostatizing at a fast rate and will sooner or later join the ranks of the false church.

The interest of the believer is not so much to identify the false church, that is, to be able to label certain churches as false. But neither may he be complacent to find that his church is somewhere “in the wedge.” As noted, the issue is which church to *join*.

Also, one must recognize that no church is standing still. A church is either striving to be more faithful to the Word of God, or it is moving away from the truth. That is in harmony with the Reformation’s slogan, “We must be Reformed and always reforming.” Always reforming involves continually conforming the church’s doctrine and practice to the standard of the Bible.

What church, then, ought the Christian to join? It should be obvious that a Christian should join himself or herself to the church that is at the point of the wedge. That is, to the church where the three marks are the most clearly manifest. This is the church that preaches the pure doctrine of the gospel, for that is the essential mark, and the others flow out of it.

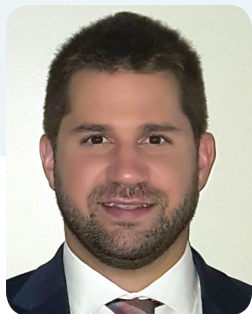
But one might say, how can one know which church is at the sharp edge, at the very point of the wedge? The answer is—the Bible. The Bible is *the* standard for truth. It is necessary to compare what this church is preaching with the truth of Scripture. The Reformed confessions also help in the evaluation. This is what the Belgic Confession requires. Believers must join themselves to the true church. Here is the church where the marks are most clearly manifest. The obligation is to join that church—at the point of the wedge.

Every believer must be convinced, then, that the church of which he is a member is truly at the point of the wedge where the marks are most purely manifest. Whether one is living in Singapore, Russia, Brazil, America, or Germany, one must be sure that the church where he is member is at that point. This is not implying that there is one church in all the world that is at the point of the wedge and all Christians must move to that country and join that church. Not at all. Stay in your own country, believers, and as Jesus instructed, proclaim there “what great things God has done for you.” Build up the church there. And work mightily to see to it that the church is moving, not away from the truth, but rather toward greater clarity and faithfulness. If indeed there is no true church of Christ in your country or area, you are obligated to move. For outside the true church, there is no salvation.

What a privilege and responsibility God gives to each believer! Not only must the believer join the true church, but he must also be a living member of that church—praying for her; loving each and every member; ever guarding the offices so that qualified men are faithful watchmen on the towers of Zion; submitting to these men, and thus to the yoke of Christ; and watching that the church is preaching the pure doctrine of the gospel.

It is an unspeakable blessing to be a member of such a church. Let not the imperfections of the officebearers and the sins of the members cause you to lose sight of the privilege. Christ is there, feeding, governing, and caring for His beloved flock. There the believer can flourish in his generations.

May God continue to preserve and bless His church on the earth until the day that Christ comes to take His people to Himself.



All around us

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin

Of Christian universities and Reformed church synods

Dordt, Calvin to become universities

Calvin College and Dordt College announced this past May that they would soon be changing their names to “Calvin University” and “Dordt University,” respectively. Calvin College will change its name sometime in 2020, while Dordt College will change its name on May 13, 2019. (For seniors at Dordt, this means that the class of 2019 will be the final class to graduate from Dordt College—three days before the name-change.) Calvin College’s website gave the following announcement:

On Thursday, May 3, Calvin College’s board of trustees unanimously approved Calvin College becoming Calvin University. The move is part of Vision 2030, a statement which provides vision for the college as it fulfills its mission over the next decade.

The shift to university, which was approved during the board’s spring meeting, will happen in 2020 during the 100th-anniversary year of Calvin becoming a four-year college. The board’s decision follows the unanimous endorsement of the college’s faculty senate in late April, marking the culmination of more than nine months of collaborative strategic work taken on by the Calvin community.¹

What is the reason for the name change? Two things, mainly: expanded academic programs and an appeal to more international students. Writing for *Christianity Today*, Kate Shellnutt explains:

Schools across the United States have gradually transitioned from *college* to *university* as a way to indicate graduate offerings and compete for clout in the packed higher education landscape—particularly with the influx of international students....

...Over the next two years, Calvin will make its change to a university official through legal and accrediting institutions, then will shift its governance structure. Unlike the streamlined college setup, universities

typically have leadership in place for each of their schools and programs.

Counting Calvin’s upcoming name change, 15 percent of colleges affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) have dropped *college* for *university* over the past five years.

...“Typically, the change stems from an increase in graduate degree offerings and/or the desire to attract more international students,” said Rick Ostrander, CCCU vice president for academic affairs and professional programs.²

Speaking personally, the change makes sense. International students (as I once was) typically associate the term “college” with junior college or community college-level schooling, while the term “university” is clearly understood as referring to schools of higher learning. Prospective students might overlook an institution of learning simply because it refers to itself as a *college* rather than a *university*. The name change could be used to draw international students who might not otherwise consider one of these institutions of learning, and boost enrollment. This might particularly be the case for Calvin College, where international students make up 12 percent of the student body (about double the U.S. average), and where year-over-year enrollment has been falling for each of the last five years. While researching for this article, I came across these interesting statistics on Calvin College gleaned from a recent issue of the *Calvin Chimes*:

In 1998, 2,261 students—over half the student-body—came from the CRC, while in the fall of 2017 only 1,175 students—around 30 percent of the student body—belonged to the CRC. This drop of over 1,000 students seems large when compared to the net loss of 300 students the institution has faced over the same two decades.

1 <https://calvin.edu/news/archive/calvin-college-to-become-calvin-university-by-2020>.

2 Kate Shellnutt, “Goodbye, Calvin College: Christian Schools Play the ‘Name Game,’” *Christianity Today*, May 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/may/calvin-college-university-name-change-cccu-christian-school.html>.

Mitigating these losses are an increasing number of AHANA students. In 1998, the 155 non-international students of color on campus composed about three percent of the population. That number has multiplied four-fold to 621 AHANA students, or sixteen percent of the student body, in the fall of 2017. This increase of nearly 500 students, combined with more than 100 additional international students, has offset much of the enrollment-loss from the historically Dutch CRC.

It is difficult to separate the diminishing enrollment at Calvin from the diminishing membership in the CRC.³

An obvious conclusion: the more international students Calvin can draw, and the more students they can draw from outside the CRC, (to whose ears the name Calvin *University* might sound more important than the name Calvin *College*), the better they can maintain their enrollment numbers.

Activities of other denominations

Just as the PRC has its annual Synod during the summer, where it makes important decisions, so do other denominations.

Perhaps the most noteworthy is the decision of a number of Reformed denominations to terminate sister-church relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN/GKv), who decided last June to open up all of its ecclesiastical offices—minister, elder, and deacon—to women. So far this summer I have come across reports that the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) have cut off sister-church relationships with the RCN, while the United Reformed Churches of North America have terminated their corresponding relationship (“ecumenical contact”) with the RCN. The Canadian Reformed Churches will have their next general synod in 2019.

Also of interest, the United Reformed Churches (URC) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) held their broadest denominational meetings concurrently on the campus of Wheaton College this past June. According to John Van Dyk, editor of the *Christian Renewal*, “the purpose of sharing both time and facilities was in honour of the publication of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, a new songbook for worship that the OPC and

the URC prepared cooperatively, a book that most of the congregations will use for worship.”⁴ Elsewhere in the magazine it was mentioned that this new songbook contains 278 psalter numbers and 458 hymns. That makes a total of 736 songs. When comparing these numbers to the well known blue *Psalter Hymnal*, that is a loss of 32 psalter numbers, and an addition of 275 hymns. The new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* also includes both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, but each denomination will have to produce a separate booklet containing its own specific liturgical forms (unlike ours, which are found in the back of our *Psalter*.) For the URC, this marks the end to a 21-year project to produce their own unique *Psalter Hymnal*.

If I were to give a pessimistic analysis, I would say that not only do we see evidence again of hymns pushing out psalter numbers from the *Psalter Hymnal* (which, historically, happens repeatedly), but even of hymns pushing out the precious Reformed liturgical forms. I do not understand how anyone could be happy leaving the Reformed minor confessions out of the back of the *Psalter*. After all, they are part of our official, authoritative, and binding *liturgy*. Take out 55 hymns (more or less), and they would fit (including our precious Church Order).

In other news, while skimming through the *Abstract of the Minutes of Synod 2018* of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), I came across two interesting matters: their work studying the issue of cremation and their work studying the issue of women voting. Writing for *Christian Renewal*, Glenda Mathes gives a helpful report on both; here I will only include some news on the issue of women voting:

The issue of whether or not women should be permitted to vote in congregational meetings has long plagued the RCUS. Rather than being a case of congregations capitulating to modern cultural pressure, allowing women to vote has been the practice of some churches for many years. Position papers approved in more recent years, however, affirm only male heads of households may vote. While most churches seem to allow only men the vote, efforts to incorporate the male-only position into the RCUS Constitution have failed so far. The denomination remains divided over this issue.

An overture last year asked: “Is voting by a woman in a congregational meeting a violation of 1 Timothy 2:11-12?” In response, Synod 2017 established a committee to study a slightly different question: “Is voting in the church an exercise of authority according to the

3 Nathan Stripp, “CRC membership decline correlates with Calvin enrollment,” *Chimes*, Calvin College, April 28, 2018. <https://calvinchimes.org/2018/04/26/membership-in-the-crc-in-decline/>. “AHANA” students are those who identify themselves as African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native-American, and are U.S. Citizens or Permanent Residents.

4 *Christian Renewal*, July 13, 2018 (Vol. 36, #14/15), 4.

Scriptures?” This year’s Synod recommitted the study paper to the Committee and changed the question to: “Does a Christian woman (single or married) exercise authority over a man when she votes?”⁵

As I read through the various activities of other Reformed denominations, and as I think about the work

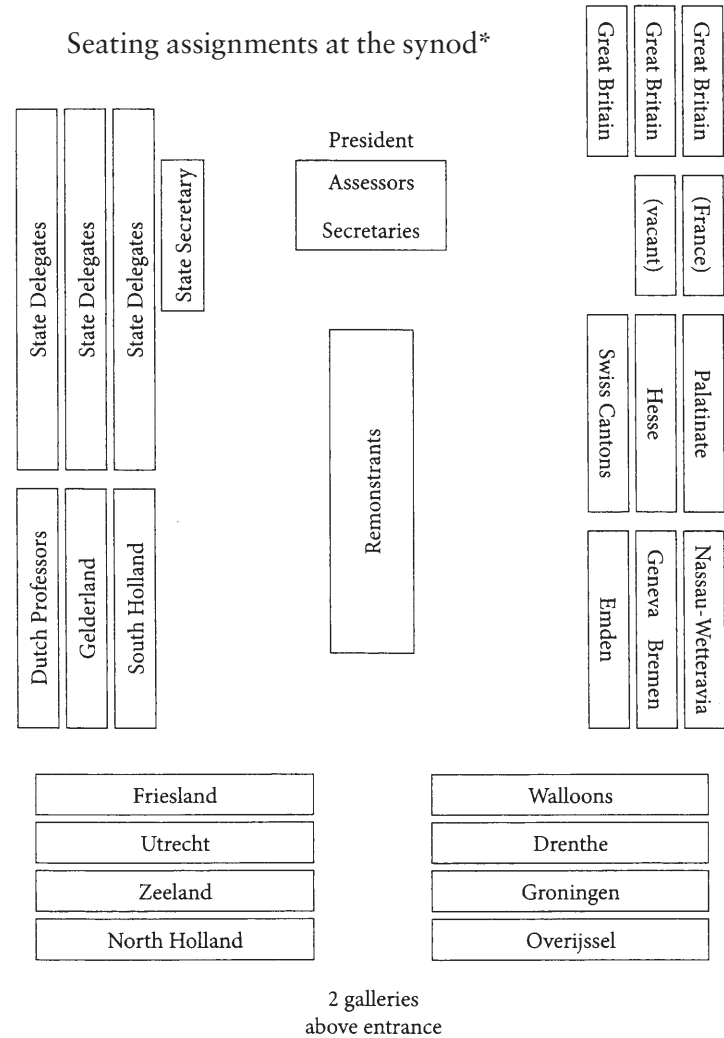
5 Mathes, *Christian Renewal*, 21.

of our own denomination, I am reminded of the fervent petition of the psalmist in Psalm 25:4-5, “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.” And I am reminded of the exhortation of Psalm 122:6-9: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.”



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 (2) Delegates



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



* The familiar picture (above) of the delegates of the Synod of Dordt in session is based on a copperplate engraving by the Dutchman François Schillemans. The seating chart identifying where the various delegates sat is found in *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae* (1618-1619), ed. Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht), volume 1, XXIII.

Delegates to the Synod of Dordt numbered 104 men. They fall into four groups: 1) minister and elder delegates from the provincial synods, 2) theological professors, 3) international delegates, and 4) delegates from the national government.

Of the ten Dutch provincial synods that sent delegates, nine were synods of geographical regions—Gelderland-Zutphen, South Holland, North Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Overijssel, Groningen, and Drenthe. The tenth, the Walloon synod, was made up of French-speaking refugees from southern Belgium who had organized churches in the Netherlands. These ten synods delegated a total of 37 ministers and 19 elders to the Synod of Dordt. Three minister delegates whose names might be familiar to some readers are Gisbertus Voetius (South Holland), Jacobus Trigland (North Holland), and Godefridus Udemans (Zeeland). Three elder delegates died during the time the synod was meeting.

The national government delegated five professors of theology to attend the synod—one each from the universities of Leiden, Franeker, Groningen, Harderwijk, and Middelburg. The professor from Groningen was none other than Franciscus

Gomarus, who had earlier been Arminius's colleague and opponent at Leiden.

Most of the 25 international delegates were professors of theology or ministers in their homelands. They came from Great Britain; from the German regions of the Palatinate, Hesse, and Nassau-Wettaravia (one delegate from the latter region died during the time synod met); from the Swiss Cantons and Geneva; and from Bremen and East Frisia (regions immediately east of the Netherlands, in the northwestern part of Germany). France chose delegates, but the French king later refused to let them go. Delegates from Brandenburg (another German region) were prevented from coming by other circumstances.

Eighteen delegates represented the national government. These were called the States General. In my next article I will explain why they were at the synod, and what role they played.

Finally, four non-delegated men served the Synod in other capacities. One was secretary to the government's delegation; another was liason between the city of Dordrecht and the government delegation; a third was the synodical treasurer; and a fourth was theological advisor to the Synod's president.



Things which must shortly come to pass

Prof. David Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Chapter five: Premillennialism (20) Fundamental Reformed critique of Premillennialism (2)

Previous article in this series: May 1 2018, p. 351.

“...He saith not, And to seeds, as of many;
but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”
Galatians 3:16

“For they are not all Israel, which are of
Israel.... In Isaac shall thy seed be called.... The
children of the promise are counted for the seed...
that the purpose of God according to election might
stand...Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”
Romans 9:6-13

Introduction

Dispensational premillennialism is false doctrine concerning the biblical doctrine of the last things, or eschatology.

It is also heresy.

One aspect of the heresy is its denial of Jesus Christ.

Premillennialism denies that the content and object of the faith of the saints in the Old Testament was the promised Messiah, who is Jesus. According to premillennial-

ism, the content and object of the faith of the saints who were saved in the old covenant was God, God directly, God apart from the Mediator of the covenant. This is to posit salvation apart from the Messiah, or Christ, who is Jesus.

This Christ-denying doctrine ignores Jesus' own testimony that the Old Testament Scripture witnessed of Him and that the Old Testament saints knew Him. In John 5:39, Jesus declared that the Old Testament "scriptures...testify of me." He continued, that "Moses...wrote of me" (John 5:46). The reason why the unbelieving Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah was that they "believe[d] not his [Moses'] writings" (John 5:47).

If dispensational premillennialists cannot see that the Old Testament testifies of the Messiah, who is Jesus—that this is, in fact, the one message of the Old Testament everywhere—they are as willfully blind and unbelieving as were the Jewish enemies of Jesus in Jesus' day.

Such were the clarity and power of the Old Testament Word of God revealing the Messiah, who is Jesus, that "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). Abraham did not see the day of God merely. Had this been all that Abraham saw, he would not have rejoiced. But he would have trembled in terror. The day of God, apart from the Messiah, who is Jesus, is awesome and terrifying to sinful people. The day of God, apart from knowledge of and trust in the Mediator, means damnation.

But Abraham saw the day of the Messiah, who is Jesus the Mediator between God and men, and the Savior. Therefore, he "was glad." So also did all other Jews who were the true seed of Abraham see Christ's day and rejoice.

Contrary to the assertion of popular premillennialist Charles C. Ryrie, John 8:56 affirms Abraham's *consciousness* of the Messiah, who is Jesus. Faith is conscious, spiritual knowledge. Seeing Christ's day is spiritual consciousness of Christ and His day. Rejoicing and being glad over the day of Christ indicate the spiritual consciousness of true faith.¹

That the knowledge and consciousness of the believer in the Old Testament were not as rich and full as the knowledge and consciousness of the believer in the New Testament does not bear on the controversy of amillennialism with premillennialism.

Denying that the Old Testament believer had Christ as the object and content of his faith and that Abraham and the other believing Jews had consciousness of the Mediator, who is Jesus, dispensational premillennialism posits salvation apart from the Messiah, who is Jesus.

Dispensationalism does indeed teach two ways of salvation, one by faith in the Messiah for New Testament saints and another by faith in God apart from the Messiah for those saved in the Old Testament.

Premillennialism's denial of Jesus

In addition, premillennialism denies Jesus by denying that He has such preeminence both in the eternal counsel of God and in history that He determines what the kingdom of God is and who the citizens of the kingdom are.

According to premillennialism, who and what determine the kingdom of God are the Jews. That which constitutes, determines, and identifies the kingdom of God is a multitude of Jews. In the future, what will create and form the kingdom of God will be multitudes of Jews, physical descendants of Abraham. It is these Jews who will enable and allow for the kingship of Jesus. He will be able to be King because of the restoration of masses of Jews as the kingdom of God.

For dispensational premillennialism, it is not Jesus who determines the kingdom of God and its citizens. But it is the (Jewish) citizens living in Palestine who determine the kingship of Jesus Christ.

To the question, "Who or what determines the Messianic kingdom of God—its reality, its nature, its location, and its citizens?" the answer of the premillennialist is not, "Jesus the Christ." But his answer is, "the Jews."

Denial of Jesus as King

Such disparagement of Jesus Christ is, in fact, a denial of Him—a denial of His primacy, His centrality, His exalted Lordship, both in the eternal counsel of God and in history.

Such is the primacy of Jesus Christ, according to the Reformed faith, that it is Jesus who determines the kingdom; Jesus who determines the citizens of the kingdom; and Jesus who determines the nature of the kingdom and of the kingdom-life.

The sphere, or territory, of the kingdom is not a sliver of land on the east bank of the Mediterranean Sea—old Canaan. The territory of the kingdom is determined by Jesus the King. It is, therefore, the heart and life where He rules by His royal Spirit and regal Word. Corporately, the territory of the kingdom, as determined by Jesus the King, is the assembly of those whom He governs

1 Defending his denial that the Old Testament believer was saved by "faith in Christ," Ryrie contends with the teaching of John 8:56 by questioning whether "the *average* Israelite understood the grace of God in Christ." Ryrie denies that Christ was "the conscious object of the faith of Old Testament saints" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1965, 122, 123).

so that they confess, “Long live King Jesus,” and their children, that is, the true church.

The citizens of the kingdom are not Jews, not even a multitude of converted Jews. Race and physical descent do not determine citizenship in the kingdom, not even the long-privileged racial descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus Christ determines citizenship in the kingdom. The citizens of the kingdom are all those, of whatever nationality, race, sex, or color, of whom Jesus is King by His sovereign grace, so that they believe on “King Jesus,” and yield to His sway, doing His will.

The kingdom of God is not a realm and a citizenry determined apart from Jesus Christ, in which and over whom He then becomes King. But the kingdom is the realm and citizenry determined and formed by King Jesus. It is whatever area and people over which and over whom Jesus rules by His Word and Spirit, so that in the area and among the people His Word is scepter.

Not the kingdom—converted Jews and the land of Canaan—is first, primary, predominant, and determinative, but the King.

Dispensational premillennialism emphasizes the kingdom—the race of Jews; national Israel; earthly Canaan. The king comes along behind in premillennial thinking. He is secondary and derivative. The kingdom determines and shapes the king and His kingship. Jesus must be an earthly king of national Israel in a future dispensation, because national Israel—a multitude of Jews—determines what the kingdom and its king are.

In the Bible, the King is first, predominant, and determinative. The kingdom is merely the extension of the King—His power, His will, His glory, His goodness, His people. The kingdom is the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col. 1:13). God’s dear Son, who is the King, determines that there is a kingdom, what the nature of the kingdom is, who the citizens are, and how one becomes a citizen. “All things,” including the kingdom, “were created by him, and for him” (Col. 1:16). The benefits of the kingdom are not carnal power and glory, with abundance of material riches. Rather, in the kingdom of which Jesus is King “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

One does not become a citizen of the kingdom of which Jesus is King by physical descent from Abraham, but by spiritual translation by God Himself, delivering him or her from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13). Citizenship in the kingdom of Jesus is at the same time membership in the church: The dear Son of God, who is King of the kingdom of God, is also “head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). Translation into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, in Colossians 1:13, is the same as membership in the church.

One does not answer the question, “What kind of King is Jesus?” by discovering the nature and citizenry of the kingdom. But one answers the question, “What kind of kingdom is the kingdom of God?” by discovering the full truth of the kingship of Jesus.

Reformed theology perfectly captures and soundly confesses this primacy of Jesus Christ as King. It does this in a striking way in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession, the opening article on the “Catholic Christian Church”: “This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal king, which, without subjects he can not be.”²

Obviously, the Reformed confession is that Jesus is King of the church. This is a truth that premillennialism vehemently denies, the supposed, contemporary “moderates,” as well as the original hardliners. This denial, by itself, decisively separates premillennialists from Reformed churches. For a Reformed church to enter into ecumenical alliance with dispensational premillennialism, as Presbyterian and Reformed theologians are working at in our day, would be the Reformed church’s denial of the kingship of Jesus Christ.

What is striking about Article 27 of the Belgic Confession is that the very existence of the church, which the article clearly identifies as the kingdom of Christ, depends upon the King. The confession does not teach that Christ is a King because there is a kingdom—the church—for Him to govern. Rather, there is and must be a church, particularly in the time of the Old Testament (something that premillennialism also denies), because Christ is an eternal King. The kingdom is due to and dependent upon the King.

That the church, which is the kingdom of Messiah, existed throughout the age of the Old Testament is proved from the fact that Christ is an eternal King. Kingship requires subjects, citizens.

In the words of Herman Bavinck, the Reformed faith honors Jesus Christ in its doctrine of the last things. It honors Jesus Christ by confessing that “eschatology...is rooted in Christology and is itself Christology.”³

Denial of Jesus as “seed of Abraham”

Similarly, on the basis of Holy Scripture the Reformed faith confesses Jesus to be the “seed of Abraham.” The “seed of Abraham” are not physical descendants of Abraham, racial Jews. The “seed of Abraham” is

2 Belgic Confession, Article 27, in Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 3:417.

3 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 4:685.

not a multitude of converted Jews in the future, among whom is also Jesus. The “seed of Abraham” is “one... which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). This one seed, to whom all the promises of God were made and in whom is all the blessing of Abraham, is so prominent, so central, so primary, that He determines who the rest of Abraham’s seed are. They are all those, and only those, who have put on Christ by a true faith in Him. “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:26-29). Jewishness does not make one part of the seed of Abraham. Being a Jew is of no account whatsoever in the matter of being part of the “seed of Abraham.” In fact, “there is neither Jew nor Greek” in the matter of the “seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3:28). Rather, being in Christ by a true and living faith is decisive. Such is the predominance, primacy, and privilege of *the* Seed, who is Jesus the Christ, that He determines all the rest of the seed.

Why then does dispensational premillennialism stubbornly identify the “seed of Abraham,” to whom is the promise supposedly of the land of Canaan and whose are the blessings supposedly of earthly power and prosperity, as masses of racial Jews?

Why do the premillennial theologians stubbornly insist that the promise to Abraham’s seed looks for a fulfillment in the future to Jewish people and national Israel?

Why do they refuse to hear the Holy Spirit’s clear word that the “seed of Abraham” always was, is today, and forever will be “Christ” and those who are in Christ by faith, that is, the whole Christ: Jesus Himself personally and the elect church, who are in Him by faith?

Reformed theology confesses Jesus as Christ—the Messianic King—in all His kingly primacy, centrality, and honor.

Dispensational premillennialism denies Jesus Christ with specific regard to His awesome kingship.

Reformed theology confesses Jesus Christ to be the all-important “seed of Abraham.”

Dispensational premillennialism denies Jesus Christ as “seed of Abraham.”

This is heresy.

The heresy is denial of Jesus the Christ.

The other heresy

Article 27 of the Reformed creed, the Belgic Confession, quoted in part above, continues its confession of the church, which is the Messianic kingdom of God, by not only attributing membership in the church, which is citizenship in the kingdom, to divine election, but by also *identifying* the citizens of the kingdom with the elect: “the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal.”⁴

Fundamental to the issue of the identity of the citizens of the Messianic kingdom is the truth of God’s eternal election.

This truth, premillennialism also denies. This denial, like its denial of the kingship of Jesus, is also a heresy

of dispensational premillennialism. The denial of election by dispensational premillennialism is not merely a mistake which Reformed theologians may tolerate in their attempt to make common, ecumenical cause with premillennialism, and which Reformed believers may ignore in their church attendance at Calvary Church in Grand Rapids or Mars Hill Church in Grandville, Michigan, but a *heresy*, which both divides premillennialism from the Reformed, Christian faith of Scripture and fundamentally

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corrupts the gospel of grace.

This, I demonstrate in the next article in this series on the millennium.

(to be continued)

⁴ Belgic Confession, Article 27, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:417.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Reville

Reville is an ugly biblical word, and one we hardly use. The sin it describes, however, occurs far too frequently in our covenant conversations, marriages, homes, schools, and churches. And the words we use—name-calling, trash-talking, teasing, kidding, losing our cool, bullying or even verbal abuse—all minimize the despicable, destructive, malicious, and vicious nature of reviling. And often, then, so does any medicine we prescribe. Rather than treat the reviler's stone-cold heart, we instead patch up the bruised and bloodied victim with the three T's, "take it, turn the other cheek, and tough it out," which in covenant relationships are the spiritual equivalent of "be warm and be full" (James 2:16). And so the vile murder continues.

Reville is the biblical word for verbal abuse, which is far too feeble a phrase. To revile is to launch any verbal assault in anger or hatred in order to humiliate, control, intimidate, injure, or destroy; it is to belittle, rail, upbraid, vituperate, reproach, castigate, vilify, threaten, insult, or slander—to name a few. Reviling is synonymous with cursing (I Cor. 4:12), scorn (Is. 51:7), and mockery (Mark 15:32), and is described as speaking all manner of evil falsely, self-exaltation by humiliation, and called a form of persecution and terrorism (Matt. 5:11; Luke 6:22; Is. 51:7). Reviling is rooted in pride, jealousy, and covetousness; in absence of self-respect, love, pity, or kindness; or in a determination to subjugate by fear (Acts 13:45; Ps. 10:3; I Pet. 3:8; Is. 51:7). It also usually involves dishonoring an office, whether of Christian, elder, parent, mother, or wife—ultimately because the reviler has no respect for the office of Christ (Act 23:4; John 9:28).

Scripture does not use the word revile much either. Twelve times. But that does not imply it takes the sin lightly. Nine times it is mentioned as sin against Christ or Christians; the rest are warnings against it. Two commandments specifically treat it (6th and 9th). And countless passages (cf. Proverbs) sharply define and condemn it without using the word. The reviler is described in satanic terms, a putrid grave for a throat, snake poi-

son behind the lips, forked tongue, and mouth full of bitterness (Rom. 3:13-14). The reviler is cruel, keeping victims alive to torture and drain identity, soul, and hope by a thousand cuts. He is a manipulative, crafty, flatterer who not only uses the tongue skillfully to kill and possess, but as a cloak to hide from the Light and as a dagger to parry the Word. Vile cursing of classmates disappears around adults, acidic speech flung at the spouse is honeyed around friends, churlish Nabal at home transforms into Moses at church, and the same tongue that quotes chapter and verse about love, respect, or submission, conveniently is silent on nearby Scripture about reviling. Furthermore, nowhere does Scripture attribute reviling to Christians. Rather, it is called the sin of the profane and irreverent (Ex. 22:28), lawless and rebellious (Is. 51:7; Acts 23:4), enemy and adversary (Ps. 44:14; 74:10), apostate and despiser of God (Zeph. 2:8; Matt. 5:11), malefactors and murderers (Mark 15:32), Pharisees and antichrists (John 9:28). And revilers are listed with fornicators, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, and drunkards who, if they remain unconverted, will not inherit the kingdom of God, and with whom we may have no fellowship (I Cor. 5:11; 6:9-10).

Certainly, a child of God can fall into this sin. He has a depraved heart too. But he will not and may not let it characterize his life. Not if he loves Christ, who was reviled to forgive the repentant reviler (the thief on the cross comes to mind); and not if he has the mind of Christ, who when He was reviled, reviled not again but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (I Pet. 2:23). And Christ never reviles those He loves. And neither may we. Yes, as Christians, we may expect to be reviled for His sake. As Christians, being reviled, we must bless; and being persecuted, we must suffer it, likewise committing our souls to the righteous Judge (I Cor. 4:12). But woe unto him who reviles even one little one whom Christ loves and for whom He died. If so, repent. Say, "I'm so sorry." Pray for forgiveness. And revile not again. For Christ's sake.



When thou sittest in thine house

Rev. Arie denHartog, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

The aged men and women in the church

The writer of this article is in the group of society designated as ‘aged men and aged women.’ Many do not want to include themselves in this group because it conjures up ideas of a group of people who have little more to do in life and have little significance. It is common to imagine that people in this group have reason to be ashamed. Many sit in their homes, later in life perhaps in retirement homes, imagining that they have little meaning and purpose any more at this stage of life. But this kind of thinking is wrong for Christians and especially for members of the Reformed church.

In the sphere of the covenant family and in the church that maintains the blessed truth of God’s gracious covenant, the aged members of the church have great importance and great purpose. God saves His elect people in families. Sometimes we see three and four and even five generations of one family in the church. The Lord has promised that in the church we will see our children’s children and peace upon Israel. To be sure, there is no reason for human pride and boasting in this reality. The presence of these families are the wonders of God’s sovereign grace who is pleased to continue His church in the line of generations. What cause for humble thanksgiving and praise to God when we see these wonders in our own families! What cause for humble praise and thanks when He saves and preserves us in our generations!

The aged should have a place of honor in the covenant home and in the church. The writer of Proverbs says concerning the grayheaded: “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31). Paul admonishes Timothy to teach the members of the church: “Rebuke not an elder [an aged man], but entreat him as a father; the elder women as mothers” (I Tim. 5: 1 and 2). This is a beautiful way to describe the honor that should be given to the aged men and women in the church, through love and respect for them.

It is a sign of the last days in which we are living that the elderly are not given the honor due to them. The modern day world is all about the young. We must do

everything in our power to please them, to keep them in the church when they are leaving by the droves. We must look to them for the future. We must listen to what they have to say. The aged are old-fashioned in their ideas and out of touch with the times. In some societies they live in old-age homes and are not taken seriously for what they have to say. Some are seldom visited or cared for because the younger generation is too busy pursuing their own agenda. We are living in a rapidly changing world, in a day of the explosion of new ideas and ever-changing lifestyles. Traditional values of home and family are considered irrelevant. In this world the elderly sometimes feel confused and left behind, unable to cope. Their insights into the philosophy and concerns of life are not taken into account.

This must not happen in the church. The aged saints, in teaching and by the godly example of their lives, must instruct the youth how they must live godly in this increasingly wicked world.

In order for aged men and women to be honorable, they must behave in a manner that is worthy of honor. This should especially be the case in the sphere of the covenant home and in the communion of the church. The inspired apostle Paul instructed the evangelist Titus working in the churches of Crete to teach each age group about their particular godly behavior. We all must be careful that we do not bring shame to the Lord and become a stumbling block in life to others.

Titus 2 gives this specific instruction for the aged in the church: “That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things” (Tit. 2:2 and 3).

However, he begins with this: “Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1). In harmony with this theme Titus must instruct the aged saints of God in the church to be sound in the faith, sound in doctrine, in the fundamentals of the faith and the glory of God. This soundness of faith must characterize the aged saints who by the grace of God have known the

truth for many years. They have grown to maturity in the truth. They have often been called on to engage in spiritual battles for the truth's sake. In these battles they have, by the grace of God, learned a great deal in their understanding of the truth; their wisdom has increased. They have stood unmoved against the winds of false doctrine in a life founded on God's Word. They have learned not to pursue every new idea that arises in the world.

Over the years of their lives they have learned the depths of the riches of God's truth by reading the inspired Scriptures over many times in their homes. Throughout their lives the senior members of the church have heard hundreds of sermons. Some of the aged men have served several times in the special offices of elder and deacon in the church. Many saints of God have learned the precious comfort of the truth of God in times of great trials and suffering, through which they remained faithful to God and His truth. The older generation has the great responsibility to pass down the legacy of their knowledge and wisdom to the younger generation in the church. The younger generation is wise to listen to what they have to say. When elderly saints of God remain steadfast over many years in the love of God and for His truth, they bring glory to the name of the Lord whom they served all their lives.

Elderly saints of God who are grandparents of covenant children must continually involve themselves in the lives of these children and seek to be an influence for good. They must talk to them often and take an interest in the spiritual direction of their young lives. Going on extended vacations, restaurant eating, spending too much time on the golf course, and maintaining expensive houses must not occupy too much of their time, for then they will often miss God-given opportunities in the lives of their children and grandchildren to give instruction and be an example of godliness.

Much of what Titus says in the above-quoted passage has to do with the great importance of godliness. Children and especially young people in the church can sometimes be turned off by hypocrisy in the lifestyle of the aged members of the church. It is, of course, not always true when young people without thinking criticize the elderly for hypocrisy. Young people can be very wrong when they criticize the elderly for hypocrisy. Sometimes they do this only to excuse their own wicked lifestyle. Through wrong and sinful judgment, they separate themselves from the true church. Sadly, they even at times leave the Christian religion altogether and join themselves to this ungodly world.

On the other hand, we who are among the older members of the church must be doubly concerned about

our lifestyle, lest we by our own worldliness and covetousness lead the youth astray.

Over the years of our ministry, having served in several congregations, I have seen among the aged in the church sad and shameful examples of behavior and attitudes that have caused others to stumble. May God forbid that our behavior either in our covenant home or in the fellowship of the church should be an offense to others as well as be dishonoring and displeasing to God.

In light of all that we have just written, how significant is the instruction of Titus 2! Aged men and women must be sober and grave and temperate in their lifestyle. These words are quite similar in meaning. Ideas are repeated for emphasis. The word "sober" is used repeatedly in the book of Titus in Paul's counsel for all ages. The idea of soberness does not mean that Christians should always be long-faced and that they should never laugh or have a smile on their faces. There is so much in the Christian life that should be the occasion for great joy and thankfulness to God. This joy should also be conveyed in the lives of aged saints, and not the attitude of bitterness over trials. The word "sober" has to do with seriousness about truth and doctrine and Christian living. The word refers to *spiritual* soberness, not merely physical soberness as opposed to drunkenness. Spiritual sobriety has to do with knowing and understanding the truth and applying it to daily living. It has to do with avoiding the judgment of God in our lives and seeking always His favor and blessing.

The words "temperate" and "grave" used in Titus 2 are similar to soberness. They suggest behavior of a person that is not given to excesses of passion, greediness, covetousness, and worldliness. They suggest self-control, the ability to control one's own spirit and temper. There have been cantankerous old men in the history of the church given to uncontrolled bursts of anger and harsh words, by which they have done great damage in the church and brought shame upon themselves. Some intemperate aged men have taken radical and unbalanced positions regarding the truth, which has led others to forsake the church in discouragement. Some of the aged men mentioned above have even withdrawn themselves from the fellowship of the church, imagining that they alone still hold to the truth while all others are pursuing false doctrine.

How much better have been those who have shown sincere love of God in their behavior. These have lived a lifestyle in which they embraced their own covenant children in tender affection. They have taken great care to show genuine love in connection with guiding young people in the truth. Their daily behavior has been of great encouragement to support their efforts in teaching

sound doctrine to the young people. The aged man who is patient in the instruction he gives remembers the days of his own youth and how hard it was for himself to appreciate the need of sound doctrine and the urgency of living by it. What a great influence such godly men have been among covenant young people!

In Titus 2 Paul addresses some specific instruction, knowing that some sins are more common in men and others in women.

Paul warns the aged women in the church not to be false accusers. One of the great evils of ungodly living is the evil of gossip, slander, and evil speaking, judgmental speech, even of fellow members of the church. Some aged saints have become so hardened in this sin that they do not even realize the shameful and destructiveness of them. Churches have been torn apart by this devilish speech. Families have been destroyed. Youth growing up in the church have become utterly discouraged by harping criticism and lack of charity.

The great positive calling of the aged women in the church is to be holy. They are to be saintly, literally, serving in the holy temple of God. The church has been greatly blessed by her saintly, aged women, who were

great in their knowledge of the Word of God through their life-long, serious study of it. These have been saintly in devotion to the church, in church attendance, and in faithful involvement in many activities and ministries of the church. They have been saintly in care for their fellow saints. What a blessed example and influence these have had over the years in the church and in the covenant home!

What a calling Paul speaks of for the aged women in the church when he says: “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Tit. 2:4, 5). What could be more antithetical to the modern-day philosophy about the role of women?! What a mighty influence these have on the succeeding generation to teach them true godliness in the covenant home and in raising their children!

Thanks be to God for the aged women who teach these truths to the young mothers of our day, supporting this teaching with their own pious self-sacrificing, humble, and godly life.



Go ye into all the world

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

Opportunities to witness: Talk about the gospel

Gathered in the fellowship hall of Provident Christian Church, in an area of Metro Manila called Marikina, our weekly Bible study was about to begin. After singing a psalm together and opening with prayer, we read Scripture, each person taking a verse. We are studying the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, and that night we were up to verse 14. I started our discussion with the remark that the principal sign of the coming of Christ is the preaching of the gospel in all the world for a witness to all nations. When that is finished, says Jesus, the end will come. I asked them, “What is this gospel that must be preached in all nations?”

How fitting, I thought to myself, for a missionary

from America to discuss the sign of the preaching of the gospel in all nations with saints in the Philippines!

As one who grew up in the West and moved to the East, from one end of the earth to the other, it was a thrill to talk with them about the preaching of the gospel in all the world!

“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Ps. 22:27).

In my last article, I pointed out that opportunities to witness come to us constantly, and when they do, we ought to focus on the gospel. When I asked the saints in our Bible study, “What is the gospel?” they gave many beautiful answers.

The gospel: Christ has come!

The gospel, said one of them, is the good news that Christ has come and established His kingdom. Another added, the gospel is the good news that God fulfilled the ancient promises He made to the fathers. Indeed, God is faithful! He kept His promise to send Christ; He will keep the rest of His promises too! What good tidings of great joy! As the angel said to the shepherds, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

Now suppose you have an opportunity to witness to a Jew or anyone who does not believe that Jesus is the Christ. How will you witness to him? The apostle Paul “reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:2-3). One who would focus on the gospel should tell him that God, the faithful God who “keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9), has kept the ancient promises made to Israel. Christ has come! Jesus is the Christ! Show the man how Jesus fulfilled the promises. Show him how Jesus was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, exactly as Jehovah said through Isaiah. Tell him how Jesus was oppressed and afflicted, yet opened not his mouth, and was brought as a lamb to the slaughter. Tell him that Jesus, though He died on a cross, was proven to be the Christ, “declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4).

The gospel: Christ justified us by His blood!

What is the gospel? Another Filipino brother directed us to Matthew 1:21, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” Jesus was born to save His people from the greatest evil, their sins! That is good news. Someone else mentioned the verse, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God loved the world so deeply, He loved men and women in all nations of the earth so much, that He gave His Son for them so that they might have everlasting life. That is an astounding message!

Soon, in our Bible study, we came to the cross. The gospel is the good news of Christ crucified. For “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of

God” (I Cor. 1:18). Christ came to seek and to save His lost sheep, to bear all our iniquities, and to die for us on the cross. And having justified us on the cross, He arose from the dead! “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,” wrote Paul, and He “rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Cor. 15:4). Now Christ lives and is able to give us eternal life! That is a message of tremendous comfort!

What is the gospel? The gospel, at its core, is the glad tidings of the full and free justification of sinners, chosen before the foundation of the world, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The gospel is the message of great joy that God saves us freely, without our works. We do not add anything to the work of Christ. We do not have to perform our way into heaven. We do not have to earn the favor and love of God by what we do. God has done everything for us in Christ, and He justifies us freely by faith in Jesus. That is truly good news!

Now suppose you meet a Roman Catholic or anyone who trusts in the sinking sand of his own works for salvation. How will you witness to him?

Last January, I heard about the procession of the “Black Nazarene,” a black image of Christ carrying a cross, in downtown Manila. The procession is an annual commemoration of the year 1787 when the image was transferred from one shrine to another. I found some video footage of the procession online. Maybe you have seen it too. Millions of Roman Catholics can be seen desperately trying to see, touch, and kiss the Black Nazarene in the hope that they will be healed from a sickness or improve their financial situation, and so on. Others can be seen riding in the carriage with the image, pushing ecstatic zealots away, and even kicking them, in order to protect their idol. Others pray to the image and cross themselves repeatedly. The whole scene stirs your spirit, like Paul in Athens, as you see the city wholly given to idolatry (Acts 17:16). And, of course, they trust that their religious devotion will help them merit eternal life.

If you live in the West, you are more likely to meet the post-modern type who trusts that he might go to heaven (if there is a heaven) because he tries to be a good person, tries to do what is right, tries to be loving and respectful to others. So, he thinks, he might make it to heaven in the end.

How do we witness to those who “trust in themselves that they are righteous” (Luke 18:9)? Praying for the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts and tongues, we ought to tell them about Jesus who saved us fully and freely by His one sacrifice on the cross. We ought to tell them what God has done for us in Christ by His amazing grace and

mercy. We ought to speak of the tremendous comfort and freedom of belonging to Christ with body and soul, in life and death. We do not have to merit eternal life by our works. We do not have to chase a black image of the Nazarene, or confess our sins to the priest, or try to make satisfaction by our works. We must not trust in ourselves that we are righteous, because we can never do enough to convince God to let us into heaven. But we are righteous in Christ by faith! Trust in Christ! Christ is the solid Rock on which to stand! All other ground is sinking sand! We have hope for eternal life! For God has done it all!

The gospel: The Holy Spirit sanctifies us daily!

I reminded the members of our Bible study that the gospel includes the wonderful news that God has not only justified us, but that He also sanctifies us daily! “For by grace are ye *being* saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). That is what Paul literally wrote there. God has not only chosen us, redeemed us, regenerated us, and justified us, but He is also sanctifying us day by day. And He promises to perform that good work which He has begun in us until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). The gospel includes this incredibly hopeful and encouraging message! We are crucified with Christ, nevertheless we live, because we are new creatures in Him. God is setting us free from the sins that used to enslave us. He will set us free more and more by the power of the Holy Spirit, for He works in us both to choose and to follow the everlasting way, to seek the things which are above and to repent of our sins, to pluck out the right eye that offends us, to enter in at the straight gate and to walk on the narrow way that leads to life, to mortify the flesh, and to love God, to love our wife or husband, and to love our enemy. What a joyful gospel! God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13)!

Now suppose you cross paths with a man who desperately wants to break free from some spiritual slavery, an addiction to drugs, alcohol, or sexual sin. How will you witness to him? Besides the other kinds of help he probably needs, such as rehab, counseling, and accountability, he needs to hear the gospel of God again and again. You ought to tell him about the full and free forgiveness of sins in Christ! There is no condemnation

to them who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). And...for us who are in Christ Jesus, there is power from the Holy Spirit to overcome sin! There is power to live a new and godly life! There is power to be holy and blameless before God (Eph. 1:4). There is power to win the battles of temptation against the devil. And we are already more than conquerors through Him who loves us (Rom.

8:37). You ought to tell him that when you know Christ, when you know the love of God in Christ, when you know that He is your God and you are His child through Christ, when you know that He will always be with you, will always forgive you, will always bless you, then you will also experience victory over sin. For apart from Christ, there is no victory over sin.

You ought to tell him that when you know Christ, when you know the love of God in Christ, when you know that He is your God and you are His child through Christ, when you know that He will always be with you, will always forgive you, will always bless you, then you will also experience victory over sin. For apart from Christ, there is no victory over sin.

over sin. For apart from Christ, there is no victory over sin.

The gospel: Christ will come again!

Finally, we noted in our Bible study that the gospel includes the good news that Christ will come again! Right now, He is preparing a place for all His brethren in Father’s house. Right now, He is sitting at the right hand of God, working all things together for our good and directing all things to the glory of God. But soon He will come on the clouds with power and great glory. He will call the dead out of the graves, both the wicked and the righteous, and He will judge them. He will then take all of His chosen ones, for whom He died on the cross, the new Jerusalem, into the new creation where the tabernacle of God will be with men, and He will dwell with us, and we shall be His people, and He shall be with us and be our God (Rev. 21:1-3). That is a message of blessed hope!

If we have opportunity to witness to someone in deep distress, to someone indifferent about spiritual things, or to someone steeped in idolatry, let us direct his attention away from this brief life to eternity! Let us speak to him about heaven and hell. Let us speak of the final judgment. That too is part of our Christian witness (Acts 17:31).

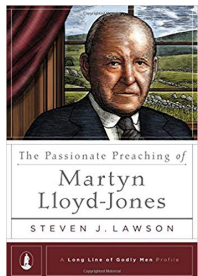
“This gospel of the kingdom,” said Jesus, “shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14).

May God be pleased to use you, as you sound out the word of the Lord in the area in which you live, to gain the elect to Christ for the glory of His grace.



Bring the books...

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



The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, by Steven J. Lawson. A Long Line of Godly Men Profile. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2016. Pp. xvii + 188. Cloth. [Reviewed by Rev. Joshua Engelsma]

Under the editorial eye of Steven Lawson, Reformation Trust has pumped out a number of profiles of significant figures in church history—men such as John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Knox, Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther, Isaac Watts, George Whitefield, John Owen, and William Tyndale. To that list is now added the name of Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

My first introduction to Lloyd-Jones came toward the beginning of my time in seminary. One of the books we were required to read was Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers*. I recall absolutely devouring it. Here was a book that set forth clearly and thoroughly what preaching ought to be. Here was a man who understood preaching.

It was the remembrance of that delightful read that interested me in this little book on Lloyd-Jones. Although I profited from his book on preaching, I knew nothing about the man who wrote it.

The opening chapter of Lawson's book gives some biographical information on Lloyd-Jones. He was born in Wales in 1899, but his family later moved to London because of financial struggles. In London he became an accomplished medical doctor with a seemingly bright future in that field. But when he was twenty-six, he left his practice because he felt called to the gospel ministry. Without any seminary training, he was ordained into the ministry as a Calvinistic Methodist and served his first pastorate in Wales. He later became the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, a position he held for more than twenty-five years. It was during his time there that he became a well-known figure in evangelical circles both in Britain and in the United States. He laid down his active labors in 1968 and died in 1981.

Although the book does provide some biographical details, it is not intended to be a biography. If you're looking for a full recounting of the life and influence of Lloyd-Jones, you will have to look elsewhere.

The focus of the remaining eight chapters is on Lloyd-Jones' method and style of preaching. The author examines such topics as his view of the call to the ministry, his underlying view of Scripture, his method of exposition, his doctrinal basis, and his dependence upon the Spirit for power and passion in preaching.

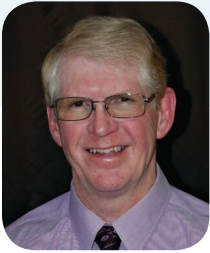
A couple of things struck me as I read the book.

In the first place, Lawson makes the point several times that Lloyd-Jones' preaching was a combination of truth and passion—"logic on fire." I disagree with the author's assertion that, while one must follow the Reformers for the truth, he must look to the Methodist revivals and Great Awakenings of such men as John Wesley for the passion (27, 136). Nevertheless, the point is well made that preaching must be passionate and lively. Preaching is not simply the imparting of information, but it is "making the Bible come alive" (65). There must be the "union of truth and fire"—"the light of truth and the heat of passion" (79). Preaching must not be "dry and lifeless." According to Lloyd-Jones, the church members "sense it at once; they can tell the difference immediately." When there is a Spirit-wrought passion in the preaching, God's people "are gripped, they become serious, they are convicted, they are moved, they are humbled" (169).

In the second place, I was struck by the fact that Lawson's book is in many ways a summary of Lloyd-Jones' book on preaching. This is not a knock on Lawson. A book that summarizes a much longer book in half the number of pages has its place. I was certainly encouraged and motivated by the book, and I trust both young and old will profit from it as well.

So, read and be convicted by Lawson's book.

But then read and be moved by Lloyd-Jones' book.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which PRCA congregation is located in a capital city?
Answer later in this column.

Sister-church news

From the July 15 bulletin of the Grandville PRC in Michigan we hear this significant news: “Council reminds the congregation of our acceptance of Synod’s appointment to be the calling church for the minister on loan (MOL) to Singapore. At our recent meeting we formed a trio consisting of Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. S. Key and Rev. R. Kleyn. We have scheduled a congregational meeting for August 5, 2018, directly following our evening service, to vote for one from among these men to receive the call to serve as MOL for our sister church in Singapore. May the Lord of the church bless this endeavor for the glory of his name.” Concerning that report, we may give this update: At that congregational meeting, Rev. R. Kleyn received the call.

Evangelism activities

Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. R. Kleyn, and Rev. C. Griess traveled to Mexico City July 24 to give speeches for and make contact with Presbyterian church members and church leaders in that part of Mexico during the span of two weeks. The people they met were from two denominations of Presbyterian churches, along with the professors and students of John Calvin University, who are striving to be faithful to their Reformed heritage. Doner Bartolon, who is from Mexico and who intends to start seminary training in the PRC seminary in 2019, is the means by which God has allowed for this contact. Doner was born and raised in the Reformed faith in Mexico and has since become convicted of Protestant Reformed doctrine. First PRC (Grand Rapids) sponsored the trip as an investigative endeavor. In addition to preaching two Sundays, five different conferences were held on subjects such as the covenant, Calvinism, the history and doctrines of the PRC, and sexual ethics (youth conference).

Young people’s activities

In the Lynden, WA bulletin in July we find this item: “The Western Young People’s Retreat, held this past week in eastern Idaho, was a huge success! Young people and families from Lynden, Spokane, Loveland, Edmonton, and Lacombe attended the retreat. Rev. Regnerus and Rev. Kleyn spoke on the theme of ‘Communion with God’ from Psalm 63. Speeches and discussion groups focused on how to improve one’s personal devotions. What an encouraging and spiritually uplifting week it was! What a blessing it is to see our young people enjoy good fellowship together and also display a serious desire to live their faith and walk closer with their God. We thank our covenant God for His many blessings!”

And at the time of this writing, the annual Young People’s Convention, held at the Lake Geneva Christian Center at Alexandria, MN is just around the corner. In addition to the speeches and profitable discussions, we are sure the conventioners are looking forward to the Hawaiian Luau banquet! Hopefully, we will have more about the convention in the next issue. [The reporter is a chaperone.]

Congregational activities

The congregation of Randolph, WI PRC plans to celebrate their 75th anniversary on August 25. A congregational picture was taken recently and a special commemorative booklet is being produced.

Missionary activities

Rev. Daniel Kleyn wrote to inform us about the tropical storms that included monsoon rains passing through the Philippines. He reported eleven inches of rain in a week, with five inches in one night. All the schools in Manila were cancelled for the day due to local flooding. Extremely high humidity exists in those conditions!

Classis activities

At the request of Heritage PRC (and Doon PRC), the Classical Committee of Classis West changed the date

for the meeting of Classis West to August 29. It had previously been scheduled for September 26. Also, at the request of Heritage PRC, the location was changed. Peace PRC hosted the August 29 meeting of Classis where Pastor-elect Jonathan Langerak was examined, while Heritage PRC will host Classis on March 6, 2019, the Lord willing. Pastor-elect Langerak's ordination and installation service was scheduled for Friday, August 31, 2018 at 7 P.M. at Heritage PRC, with the service to be conducted by Rev. Rodney Kleyn. Throughout the summer Pastor-elect Langerak kept busy supplying various pulpits in the churches of Classis West and in Limerick.

School activities

The Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School Society recently approved a plan to renovate the basement of the church building nearby to add three additional classrooms. The congregation also approved this project. Fundraising is underway for future expansion and growth. The need for additional space for the education of covenant children is a good problem to have! May God continue to bless our schools!

Trivia answer

To our knowledge, the only PRCA congregation lo-

cated in a capital city is the First PRC of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The city of Edmonton itself has a population of about one million, with the metropolitan area numbering almost 1.5 million people. Edmonton is listed as Alberta's second largest city, and the fifth largest in Canada. Edmonton is North America's northernmost area with a population of over one million and residents of Edmonton are known as Edmontonians. Edmonton is also home to North America's largest shopping mall, the West Edmonton Mall, which was the world's largest mall from 1981-2004. There's your geography lesson for today! More trivia next time.



First PRC of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

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

Announcements

Address change

Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth (Pat) Koole have moved to:
4414 Creek View Dr.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
Phone: (616) 797-4191

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 12, 2018, at 8:00 A.M., in the Grace Protestant Reformed Church, Standale, Michigan.
Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church extend their sincere sympathy to James and Kelly Jansma and family, in the death of their father and grandfather, **Jimmy Jansma**. I Peter 5: 6, 7: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.”

Rev. Steven Key, President
Luke Griess, Clerk

Seminary convocation

The Seminary Convocation is planned for September 5, 2018, at 7:00 P.M., in Providence PRC. Prof. B. Gritters will give the message from Acts 20:24: “None of these things move me...” The student body will be introduced. All are invited to attend.

Announcements continued

Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1-3, 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.

Reformed Free Publishing Association ANNUAL MEETING

REV. ANGUS STEWART will speak on:

"The RFPA, the CPRC, and the Spread of the Truth"

- ⇒ How does a typical professing Christian today need to be instructed in his thinking and living?
- ⇒ How does the RFPA help with this instruction?
- ⇒ How does the RFPA help the CPRC?
- ⇒ How do we know that the translations of the CPRC are accurate?

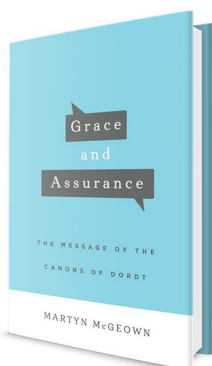
Date: September 27, 2018

Time: 7:30pm

Location: Grace Protestant Reformed Church



Grace and Assurance The Message of the Canons of Dordt



In 1618-19 the great Synod of Dordt met to counter the Arminian error that was threatening the peace and welfare of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The fruit of their deliberations was the Canons of Dordt, a creed which has defined the Calvinist, Reformed faith for centuries.

This accessible commentary on the Canons leads readers through the comforting message of the creed: being wholly saved by God's *grace*—not one's own merit—comes with the steadfast *assurance* of eternal and unchangeable election.

by Martyn McGeown



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Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Carl Haak

- Sept. 2 "Conviction for Christian Education"
Ephesians 6:4
- Sept. 9 "God's Mercy with Repentant Sinners"
Jonah 3:10
- Sept. 16 "A Sinful Response to Sovereign Mercy"
Jonah 4:1-5
- Sept. 23 "God's Rebuke of a Pouting Prophet"
Jonah 4:6-11
- Sept. 30 "A Greater than Jonah Is Here"
Matthew 12:41