

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

July 2020 • Volume 96 • No. 18

PRCA Synod issue

2020 highlights

What the Lord requires of Synod 2020

Rev. Garrett Eriks

News on Synod of 2020

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Pictures of Synod 2020



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster

Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles.

Letters to the editor should be limited to 600 words, be written in a brotherly fashion, and be in response only to published articles (not to published letters). More extensive exchanges on a significant topic of broad interest may be included as guest contributions at the editors' discretion. Letters and contributions will be published at the editor's discretion and may be edited for publication.

All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Subscription price

\$27.00 per year in the US, \$39.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$27.00
esubscription free to current hardcopy subscribers.

Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prca.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

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

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

Church news editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom office

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

Contents

Meditation

- 413 What the Lord requires of Synod 2020
Rev. Garrett Eriks

Editorial

- 415 Reformed theology's commentary
on the pandemic of 2020 (2)
Prof. Barrett Gritters

Editorial

- 418 News on Synod of 2020
Prof. Russell Dykstra
- 420 Pictures of Synod 2020
Nick Kleyn, Jr. and John VanBaren

Pillar and ground of truth

- 422 The Council of Constantinople AD 381
Necessary to *defend* Nicea
Prof. Douglas Kuiper

God's wondrous works

- 424 God's sure promise
Rev. James Laning

Go ye into all the world

- 426 Love for the truth on the mission field
Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Strength of youth

- 427 Entitlement (2)
Rev. Ryan Barnhill

Bring the books...

- 430 *Letters from Katie Luther: A Novel*
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Activities

- 431 News from our churches
Church profile—Georgetown PRC
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan

What the Lord requires of Synod 2020*

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Micah 6:6-8

As synod begins, dark clouds are hanging over our denomination. We remember tonight how COVID-19, which has brought the world to a standstill, has affected our churches. Gathering for corporate worship has not been the same. Synod's meetings are affected as well. The synod of the PRCA is the only synod I know of that is actually meeting at its scheduled time, for which we give thanks to God. However, synod can only meet if attendance is limited to those who need to be there for synod to conduct its business.

But there is a larger, darker, and growing cloud hanging over our denomination now. This is evident from some of the appeals and protests coming to synod. Appeals and protests are not rare at synod. But some of these appeals and protests are dealing with matters synod has judged in the past, which tells us there is ongoing unrest and disagreement with the decisions of our assemblies on these matters. There is a growing divide in our churches with the formation of a new publishing organization and a new magazine. Along with this there are accusations, charges, and a critical spirit among some that has resulted in the gloominess of factions, divisions, and tensions in our denomination. And it is painful.

I do not stand before you to provide my own commentary on these things, but to preach the gospel for the encouragement of synod and our churches in a diffi-

cult time. In these times, what does God require of us? He requires what He has always required. He requires that we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. This is not a three-step program to fixing all that is wrong with our churches. God does not require the synod to fix everything. Decisions must be made, certainly. But God does not come to Synod 2020 of the PRCA demanding we fix everything. He requires what He has always required: do good. This is simple, direct, and vital for how we live as God's people right now.

Gratitude

When Micah spoke these words to Judah, the people were not concerned with gratitude but self-righteousness. This is evident from the context. The Lord called Micah to prophesy in Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Although two of these three kings did what was right in God's eyes, this was a period in Judah's history marked by extreme wickedness. The worship of Jehovah continued during the period, but for most in Judah their worship was vain. They worshiped God but their hearts were far from Him. This is evident from the ongoing idolatry that plagued Judah. And this was a time of injustice, lying, and violence. Mercy and kindness were not shown to the oppressed. Instead, the oppressed were exploited and abused.

In Micah 6, the self-righteousness of Judah is exposed when the Lord brings them into His courtroom (vv. 1, 2). The Lord declares that He has a controversy with them. He requires of them an answer. Micah speaks for the people in verses 6 and 7. In these words, the heart of Judah is exposed. The question is, how shall they come before the Lord? There is no confession of guilt, grace, and gratitude. Instead, they say, "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?" They said they brought to God their best calves, even calves they fed for a whole year. If that is not enough, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" They substitute quantity for quality. Maybe if

* Pre-synodical sermon: June 8, 2020.

we bring more, then God will be pleased with us. And if that is not enough, “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?” Judah refers here to the heathen practice of offering one’s firstborn to their god. The idea is, “What does it take to pacify Jehovah God? We have done everything God has demanded of us. This should be enough!”

Judah’s wrong view of the covenant is exposed here. They fall into the delusion of self-righteousness and works-righteousness. They think they can gain God’s favor by keeping the ceremonial law. Will not God’s wrath be appeased with animals—either quality or quantity or both? They do not understand their transgression before God. This is the same heresy of the Pharisees that Jesus’ addressed and that the church continues to fight.

This is not what motivates the delegates of the PRCA to Synod 2020. We are not motivated by a self-righteous thinking that we can earn a good outcome by following the letter of the law. We do not come in the delusion of taking our transgressions lightly or striving for a good appearance. God detests this.

The right viewpoint of the covenant is the motivation to express thanks to the Lord for His covenant goodness in Jesus Christ.

In verses 4 and 5, God reminds Judah what He did for them. He does this in response to His questions in verse 3, “What have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.” The clear answer is that He has not wearied them, unless they count unchanging mercy and unconditional goodness as wearisome. The Lord reminds them in verses 4 and 5 of what He has done for them: I delivered you out of Egypt’s bondage and I cared for you in the wilderness even when Balak hired Balaam to curse you.

The Lord reminds them and us that He alone establishes, maintains, and perfects His covenant. His covenant is an unbreakable bond of love and fellowship with His people in Jesus Christ. The Lord has done everything to bring us into this covenant. He has done this through the work of Jesus Christ by which we are reconciled to Him. All the sacrifices and feasts of the Old Testament pointed back to the deliverances the Lord gave to His people and they pointed ahead to what He would do in the promised Messiah. The sacrifices and feasts were not opportunities to earn the Lord’s favor, but they testified of His covenant faithfulness. Thus, God’s people were to be motivated in life by gratitude to Him.

This is what God says to us as we begin synod: remember My goodness and be motivated by gratitude. He is so good to us and we are so undeserving. It would

be easy with the darkening clouds hanging over our denomination to forget what God has given and forget to be thankful. God has given us much. He has given us the good gift of Reformed church government and men who are called to and equipped for the offices. God has equipped us to be churches who are the pillar and ground of the truth. God has preserved us in our heritage and history (for almost 100 years) although we are so completely undeserving. God has given us the ministry of the gospel and men to preach and opportunities to preach in many different places around the world. Let us give thanks!

Goodness

Out of gratitude, we are required by God to do good. This goodness is described in three ways: *do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God*.

What does it mean to do justly? The text is not speaking of social justice, as the world speaks of it. There are so many broader assemblies of denominations that deal with social justice issues. This is not what God calls us to deal with. We are called to deal with ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner.

Doing justly reflects God’s character because God is just (Deut. 32:4). What is good and just is determined not by a mob but by God. He is the standard of doing justly because He is perfect and always does what is right. He only and always does what is good and just.

Doing justly especially refers to the fair and just treatment of others, especially those who are struggling and disadvantaged. Injustice is to take advantage by an abuse of a position of authority. Such injustice is vividly described in Micah 3:1-3 and Micah 6:10-12. Those who are in positions of authority and power must not use those positions to take advantage of others, but to do justly to them. Specifically, those who are in office in the church must treat the members of the church fairly and justly.

God requires that we love mercy. What is mercy? Mercy is the compassion and pity toward others that is rooted in God’s mercy for His people. Micah 7:18 tells us that God delights in mercy. Hosea 6:4 declares that the Lord’s mercy is refreshing like morning dew. Mercy is the compassion and pity God has on His people in the misery of their sin. Mercy is God’s desire to bless. Mercy is God’s activity of saving His people—miserable in their sin, in Christ and forgiving their sins.

Mercy is the compassion and pity with which we are to deal with each other in the context of sin. Mercy is an attitude of compassion and pity upon others, a desire to do them good, and the action of helping them.

We are called to love mercy. We may not be indif-

ferent toward mercy. Loving mercy does not mean discarding justice. Neither does doing justly mean forgetting mercy. God does not call us to be just sometimes and merciful at others. We are to do justly and love mercy all the time. We love to be shown mercy by God. Those who love God's mercy will love to show that mercy in their lives. We will show this mercy not because we judge people are deserving of this mercy, but because we know the unchanging mercy of God in His covenant.

God requires that we walk humbly with Him. Walking with God is a beautiful covenant concept. Think of two walking together, arm in arm or hand in hand. Think of Enoch and Noah who were described as walking with God. Walking with God is to live daily in the constant awareness of God's love. It is to live knowing, loving, and delighting in God. It is to live for His glory.

We are called to walk humbly with God. The idea is to walk in submission to Him. This is an important covenant concept. God does not make us equals to Himself in the covenant. We are under Him. Thus we walk in the awareness of His greatness and glory, as this is revealed in His grace and mercy. The one who walks humbly with God fears Him. We do not live in terror but, knowing His love, we want to submit to His Word and rule in all of life.

What does God require of synod and our churches in this tumultuous time? He requires what He has always required: do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him. In the decisions we make, may justice prevail—the justice of God's Word and truth. In the decisions we make and discussions we have, may we love mercy, reflecting the mercy of God. In all our work this week, may we walk humbly with our God.

This is also what God requires of us as a denomina-

tion. No backbiting, slander, or schism because this is contrary to justice and mercy. I am glad that we do not have protestors, as we find in cities around us, coming to our assemblies. But do some of us have our own form of protest (not formal protests to a church body, but outward displays of rebellion)? Such rebellious protests are contrary to justice, mercy, and walking humbly with God. Instead may God's justice and mercy prevail in our churches at this time. Truth is important, and God's truth will always prevail. But at the same time we must not think that defense of the truth means we may discard justice, mercy, and humility.

Gifted

When we see what God requires of His church, we see a people who fall short. We might think the only one who fell short was Judah. They did not do justly, love mercy, or walk humbly with God. Not only is this true of Judah, but this is also true of us. We all have fallen short.

We see our great need for Jesus Christ. He is the only One who walks in this way perfectly. He was so just He perfectly obeyed His Father as He bore the penalty of the law in our place. He loved mercy by dying on the cross on our behalf. He walked humbly with His Father, delighting to do His will as He laid down His life in obedience to the Father's will. We see in Jesus Christ the One who took our place and the One whom we desperately need for the injustice of our sin. In a world of injustice, the greatest injustice is our sin against God.

The strength we need to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God is found alone in the cross of Christ (II Cor. 5:14, 15). May the Lord grant us this strength!



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

Reformed theology's commentary on the pandemic of 2020 (2)

Pandemic and pandemonium

One month ago when I last wrote (mid-May), American churches were about nine weeks into enduring the government's orders against public gatherings. Now (mid-June), most states in the U.S. and some provinces in Canada have relaxed the restrictions, although others in

Canada have not. Many people of God have not attended public worship for months. We have ecclesiastical friends in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, where tight restrictions remain for public gatherings and travel is limited or simply cut off. We have suffered under this heavy hand of God in the world. That's the pandemic.

Since then, pandemonium has supplanted the pandemic at the top of the news around the world. The police's killing of George Floyd in the U.S. state of Minnesota has occasioned protests worldwide, calling for justice, with their banner "No Justice, No Peace." Following that motto, these protests are anything but peaceful demonstrations. These are the mayhem of riots and looting, the bedlam of property destruction, and the lawless abuse of government officials seeking to maintain peace and order.

Pandemic is from the Greek, referring to a disease among *all* ('pan') *people* ('demos'). *Pandemonium* is from the Greek, referring to the chaos, bedlam, mayhem, and disorder among people, as if *all* ('pan') the host of *devils* ('demonium') were let loose. Satan and his minions seem to have their way among men and women who reject all rule except mob rule, which is *anarchy*, also from the Greek meaning *no* ('a') *rule* ('archy').

We live in a very difficult time, when our Father's hand brings disease and gives the world over to the lawlessness it so fervently seeks.

Reformed theology has the best, really the only, way to interpret for the people of God these otherwise strange and fearful happenings in the world. Reformed theology, we are convinced, is simply the doctrine of the Bible, and the Bible is the lens through which the believer must look in order to bring order out of the disorder. That is, Reformed theology is faith's *seeing* what unbelief and false teaching cannot see. Reformed theology is faith's *understanding* of what unbelief and heresy find utterly confounding.

Last time I gave a sampling of doctrines from four of the six chapters (loci) of Reformed theology that help clarify what otherwise might be fuzzy to men, that shed light on what otherwise might be dim or even dark. That editorial treated *theology* and God's sovereign providence and just judgments; *anthropology* and man's fall into sin and death; *soteriology* and the graces of sanctification and hope that God works through affliction; *ecclesiology* and the importance of public worship and the relationship between church and state. Here, I follow up with the last two chapters, *eschatology* and *Christology*.

Eschatology (the doctrine of the end times): Heaven on earth?

If it is true that Christians wrongly react to the pandemic, and churches wrongly explain troubles in the world on account of bad *theology*, *anthropology*, *soteriology*, and *ecclesiology*, it is even more so on account of false teachings in *eschatology*. Eschatology teaches the people of God what to *expect* in the end

times, what is the *goal* of God with the church's labors in the world, to what believers ought to *aim*, and unto what they press their efforts. Eschatology deals with the future—the near future and the distant future, the future of the church and the future of this world, the future of the devil and his hosts and the future of King Jesus and His relationship to all created things.

Getting eschatology wrong has been disastrous for most nominal Christians these days because their hope is earthly. Their expectations are for improvements here and now, soon. They believe God's goal with the church's labor is a Christianized world. So they press their efforts to fulfill the 'cultural mandate.' They labor hard to create an earthly kingdom. Rather than carry out the Great Commission to bring to the nations the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, they want to redeem society from its chaos. Their desire is to bring the nations the 'good news' of social equality, food for the poor, clean water, justice for women and other oppressed people, and probably a vaccine for COVID-19. They are convinced that these are what God wants for the world and that the church is the instrument to bring them about.

In addition to being bad ecclesiology, it's also false teaching regarding eschatology. Instead of quickening hope in the coming of Christ, the false teaching leads to despondency, because the depressing happenings in the world do not bode well for a Christianized world. And as for the nominal Christian church—her drift towards Roman Catholicism and her ecumenical adulteries have rendered her impotent for gospel good.

Someone once said that when a man expects to be "hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." Wrong eschatology does not concentrate one's mind, but clouds and then confuses it. It dulls one's thinking, lulls the church to sleep, as it imagines a future of ease and prosperity. If the future is to be so bright, how can such evils increase in the world? And what can be done to turn the world into a peaceful place, to make the crooked straight and the rough places plain, when men and nations are so vile? Their hopes are shaken. Worse, they expose themselves to the allurements of the Antichrist who, Scripture teaches, will someday solve the world's problems.

This is the major error of neo-Calvinism today, in which the false teaching of 'common grace' predominates special, redeeming grace. Common grace prided itself in being a 'two-track' theology—special saving grace on one track, common grace on the other. God's 'common grace' will remedy the world's violence, poverty, injustice. Special grace saves souls and prepares them for heaven. But the two-track theology has be-

come a monorail of common grace. Neo-Calvinists focus on the common grace that will save bodies and give a good life on earth. Neo-Calvinism is completely exposed to N.T. Wright's "heaven is on earth" mantra.

The bracing realism of Reformed orthodoxy 'concentrates our minds wonderfully.' Reformed theology focuses our minds on, and directs our efforts to, preaching the gospel of God's gracious salvation and establishing churches. Reformed *ecclesiology* teaches that the true church is the "Israel of God," the new 'nation' for which He cares, and that the church *institute* is the messenger of that gospel. And Reformed *eschatology* is amillennial (that is, does not teach an earthly millennial kingdom).

Biblical doctrine of the end times does promise victory to the church by faith in Jesus Christ. But it teaches that the victory comes through tribulation, suffering, persecution (John 16:33, Acts 14:22). It teaches that Christ's coming is preceded by wars and rumors of war, pestilence and other troubles in this life, and apostasy in the church (II Thess. 2). It teaches that the days right before the coming of Christ will be like the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39), terrible days of apostasy and unbelief when the true church will be small and preachers of God's righteousness ridiculed.

So Reformed eschatology helps believers to see clearly and to keep balanced in troubling times like today.

On the one hand, Reformed folk must be careful not to be extreme, as though the present troubles are 'unprecedented' and indicate the coming of Christ must be within a year or two. Reformed believers study history so that they remember there have been many, and far worse, plagues than COVID-19. A terrible plague that killed millions ended the *Pax Romana*. The Black Death (1346-1353) killed fifty percent of Europe's population, scores of millions. Smallpox killed nine of ten in Mexico and Central America. The Spanish flu killed over 20 million in 1918. At that time and for other plagues before it, government authorities forbade public gatherings, including churches. Civil unrest and riots have plagued the world for millennia. The nation-wide civil rights riots of the '60s are not forgotten, nor the Los Angeles riots of just twenty-five years ago. Reformed believers are not ignorant of history.

On the other hand, neither do they fail to hear these troubles as *increasingly* loud footsteps of Christ's coming. For much of the 2,000 years of New Testament history, the people of God have been saying, rightly, "The Lord's coming is near!" Some may have been wrong to say, "In my own lifetime!" But they have all been right to say with eager expectation, "Soon, and very soon!" Even more is this true in 2020.

Reformed eschatology also teaches that the troubles

in society will end, for a little while, with the appearance of Antichrist, the "man of sin" (II Thess. 2:2, 3). The world and false church will be united under his rule. Then matters will become far worse for the true church. Persecution will increase and the little church will be almost squeezed out of existence (could there be so few, as in the days of Noah?). Are not the troubles of these days, in the year of our Lord 2020, only more opportunities for Antichrist to 'rehearse' for persecution of the church?

But all the while, believers are waiting, hoping, longing for, expecting, crying out for, the appearing of the Bridegroom. After what seems like such a "long time" (Matt. 25:19; Luke 20:9) Jesus Himself will appear on the clouds to judge the living and the dead. He will destroy this old world and usher in the new creation that will never end. Finally, He will be *with us* in perfect covenant love.

This all is the eschatology of the Reformed faith, as explained in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&As 52, 115, 123, 127), the Belgic Confession (Art. 37), and the Westminster Standards, (CF:33; LC: 191; SC: 102).

Christology (the doctrine of Christ): Ruling on His throne

Eschatology, therefore, is not separate from Christology, for all things lead to the appearance of Jesus Christ. Christ will appear! Soon! The One to whom I belong! He redeemed me! I'm married to Him and the consummation of the marriage is coming!

And this Christ, Lord of lords and King of kings, enthroned in the heavens, is guiding all things to the perfect end *He* designed—righteous judgment of the reprobate wicked and the gracious deliverance of His precious people unto Himself.

The troubles in society and the distress in the church all lead to Christ's perfect goal for His creation.

It makes sense, then, that if I take my eyes off Christ and His coming, I begin to sink like Peter did on the Sea of Galilee. During the whole of my sojourn I must look at Him, and look for Him. According to the Reformed creed, God's lonely, persecuted child confesses: "in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake...to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory" (Lord's Day 19).

So, although the classic division of Reformed theology does not conclude with *Christology* but with *eschatology*, yet eschatology really is the culmination of Christology. The Christ of God will appear to make

all things new. The Redeemer of Israel will rend the heavens and come down. Jesus will appear to perfect my redemption and bring me into His chamber of love forever.

And when He does this, God's redeemed will all turn (again) to *theology*. For theology is not *one* of the six chapters of biblical doctrine, not even merely the first. Theology—God—is the subject of all doctrine. The Reformed faith emphasizes that the triune, Jehovah God is “all in all.” As young people may learn in the “Essentials of Reformed Doctrine” course, the six chapters of Reformed theology may be spoken thus: “God (theology) made man (anthropology) who fell and needs Christ (Christology) to deliver him from death and give him a gracious salvation (soteriology) in the church (ecclesiology) until the end (eschatology) when God (theology) will be all in all.” True, biblical doctrine, begins and ends with “God!”

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall

have put down all rule and all authority and power.... And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:24-28).

Reformed theology's ‘take’ on today's troubles—in the world and in the church—is that God reigns. The Father of the Lord Jesus who, for Jesus' sake is my Father, is governing the world in perfect wisdom, leading all creatures great and small to this end: Christ will come to judge the world, by which He will publicly justify God (the “theodicy,” see Rom. 2:5), after which He will bring all His chosen ones to Himself. There and then and forever we will live with Him, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.

The Reformed Christian is not confused. Neither is he afraid.

That is Reformed theology's take—on the pandemic and the pandemonium.



Editorial

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

News on the Synod of 2020

The first “news” about the synod is that there *was* a PRCA synod in the year 2020. The Board of Trustees and the calling church (Trinity PRC) together examined the executive orders of the state of Michigan and concluded that it would be possible to hold the sessions of synod in Trinity PRC, provided that certain regulations were followed. The consistory of Trinity and delegates of synod and their wives scattered throughout the sanctuary for the pre-synodical service on Monday evening, June 8. Shortly after officially convening on Tuesday, synod adopted the regulations proposed by the Board of Trustees. Attendance at the synod was granted only to twenty delegates (five ministers and five elders from both classes), the five seminary professors (advisors), and anyone who had official business at synod, that is, a member with a protest or appeal.

Trinity PRC is a fine place to hold synod with an abundance of space and classrooms. The excellent and thorough preparation and culinary skills of the caterers were obvious, and much appreciated by the delegates.

The bulk of the decisions has been reported to the churches through daily emails, as well as on the website of the churches (prca.org). Rather than repeat these reports, we call attention to only a few decisions with comments.

Synod adopted a significant statement of “Affirmations regarding Marriage, Sexuality, and Gender Identity.” This document sets forth the Reformed, biblical position on these practical issues facing the church of Jesus Christ especially in Western culture. The PRC has never considered it her calling to influence culture, and adopting this document is not intended to do so. The PRC has only spoken to “social issues” when the government policy was 1) contrary to Scripture, and 2) directly affected the lives of members. Two notable examples can be found in PRC history. The first has to do with Sabbath observance. The federal government was encouraging certain industries to work seven days a week to support the war effort, and the PRC synod wrote to federal authorities with her concerns and con-

victions. The second has to do with labor unions. The PRC synod wrote to government officials to ask that the unions not be allowed to force all workers in a business to join the union, again, demonstrating the biblical basis for this stand.

At this time, in the year 2020, United States government policies promote and support lifestyles in the areas of marriage, sexuality, and gender identity that are wholly contrary to God's Word. Adopting such a statement makes it manifest that the PRC do and will by God's grace maintain what the Bible requires. A denial of a specific request, for example, of a homosexual couple to use a church facility, will not be judged as an arbitrary discrimination against one couple but as an established religious principle and conviction. For the same reason, synod recommended that some form of this policy be adopted by each local congregation.

Synod adopted some changes that will affect children (and their parents who teach them). The memory verses of some of the catechism books were changed, upon the recommendation of the Catechism Book Committee. In some instances there is some relief in the length of the verses; in other books, memory verses will appear for the first time. Watch for future editions.

The two synodical committees with the longest reports are the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) and the Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC). The Lord has blessed the churches with much work in both these areas. The mission work in the Philippines constitutes the bulk of the FMC's labors, with Doon PRC (the calling church). God continues to open many doors for preaching and teaching. And that is not merely for PRC missionaries. The ministers of our sister churches in the Philippines are likewise overwhelmed by requests for help, and several times a month they conduct Bible studies and preaching services in mission stations. The white horse continues to run. The Lord is pleased to use the PRC.

The Contact Committee reports with thanksgiving on good relations with the sister churches (Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, and the PRC in the Philippines), as well as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, with whom a corresponding relationship is maintained. The CC reports on a notable change in the situation of our sister in Northern Ireland in that

the session voted to discontinue the mission work in Limerick in the Republic of Ireland. Subsequently, the missionary, Rev. M. McGeown, accepted a call to Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI and awaits U.S. government approval for immigrating to the States. Word is, it could be many months.

The other notable element in the CC's report is that the coronavirus has hindered travel to and from other churches. None of our sister churches was able to send a delegate to our synod this year. The CC has been unable to help Covenant (Singapore) with pulpit supply since March 8, and there is no end in sight for the restrictions in Singapore. Travel to South Korea, Namibia, Mexico, and Northern Ireland has been cancelled or postponed. We pray that God will open the way to maintain the relationships and give mutual aid and encouragement through personal visits and conferences.

The Lord abundantly provides for the PRC financially. This enables the small denomination to support four missionaries, five seminary professors and staff, and care for eighteen emeritus ministers or widows. Obviously there is no need to limit spending on a central part of the churches calling to "go...into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). In addition to the money coming by assessments and special collections, the PRC have benefited from many sizable

bequests. Especially interesting are bequests from two individuals who were not members of the Protestant Reformed Churches that total over two and a half million dollars. One is covering the expenses of the transition of three professors in the seminary. Another is given specifically

to the two mission committees for special projects. Let us use the money wisely, but also be encouraged to expand our labors as we have opportunity.

That brings us to another significant blessing, namely, that synod approved the entrance of two men from the churches into the seminary for the coming school year. We thank God, but continue—at synod's urging—to petition for more ministers of the Word.

Synod appointed Georgetown PRC as the host for synod 2021, to convene Tuesday, June 8, 2021, the Lord willing. Synod completed her labors in four days, concluding at 6 P.M. Friday.

May God bless the work and decisions of the 2020 Synod. Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it (Ps. 127:1).

The ministers of our sister churches in the Philippines are likewise overwhelmed by requests for help, and several times a month they conduct Bible studies and preaching services in mission stations. The white horse continues to run. The Lord is pleased to use the PRC.



Delegates to Synod 2020

Front row: Rev. R. Barnhill, Rev. R. Kleyn, Rev. R. VanOverloop, Rev. C. Spronk, Rev. J. Engelsma, Prof. R. Dykstra;

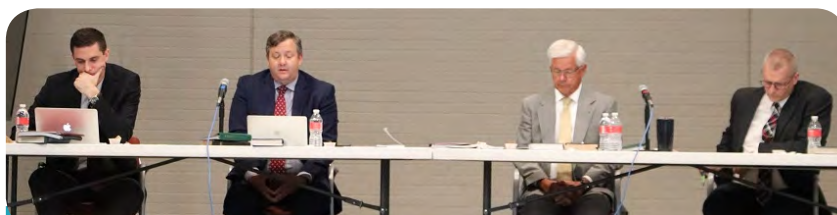
Middle row: Sid Miedema, Rev. E. Guichelaar, Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. G. Eriks, Prof. D. Kuiper, Alan VanBemmel;

Back row, left-right: Glenn Feenstra, Rev. C. Griess, Rev. J. Laning, Jim Regnerus, Brian Gritters, Prof. B. Gritters, Jim Lenting, Rick Gritters, Nick Kleyn, Rev. W. Langerak, Dave Kregel, Prof. B. Huizinga, Brendan Looyenga

Synod 2020

Trinity PRC

June 9-12, 2020



Officers of Synod:

Second Clerk, Rev. J. Engelsma; First Clerk, Rev. C. Spronk; Pres., Rev. R. Van Overloop; Vice-Pres., Rev. R. Kleyn



Committee 1: J. Regnerus, N. Kleyn, Jr., Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. J. Laning, Rev. C. Griess



PRC Seminary Professors: R. Dykstra, R. Cammenga, B. Gritters, D. Kuiper, B. Huizinga



Committee 2: G. Feenstra, Rev. R. Kleyn, Prof. B. Gritters, Rev. G. Eriks, S. Miedema



Committee 3: B. Gritters, Rev. E. Guichelaar, Prof. D. Kuiper, Rev. W. Langerak, D. Kregel



Committee 4: Rev. C. Spronk, J. Lenting, Prof. R. Dykstra, Prof. B. Huizinga, Rev. J. Engelsma, B. Looyenga



Committee 5: Rev. R. Barnhill, Rev. R. VanOverloop, R. Gritters, A. VanBemmel



Pandemic Synod
June 9-12, 2020:
Trinity PRC





Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Constantinople (AD 381) Necessary to defend Nicea

The first ecumenical council met in Nicea in AD 325 to respond to Arianism, which taught that Christ was not eternal and therefore not God. The Council declared that Christ is indeed God, of the same essence (being) as God. It expressed this position in the Nicene Creed—that is, in the first version of the Nicene Creed. (The Nicene Creed as we have it today is the version that was revised at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.)

Pause a moment: a *creed* was *revised*. Creedal revisions may not happen lightly or at whim. No mere individual may revise a creed, nor may the church revise a creed if the revision weakens or compromises the creed's summary of the teachings of Scripture. But a creed may be revised for weighty reasons and in the proper way. The Nicene Creed was revised for a weighty reason: the churches desired to express more fully the doctrine of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This revision was a strengthening, not a weakening, of the church's expression of true doctrine. And it was revised in the proper way: an ecumenical council had adopted the Nicene Creed, and an ecumenical council revised it.

So what happened between 325 and 381 that made necessary the calling of the Council of Constantinople? At least three things. First, the question arose regarding the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Second, other questions arose regarding how Christ could be both divine and human. Future articles will examine these questions. Third, some in the church openly disagreed with the decisions of Nicea. To this we turn our attention now.

“Ratifying the faith of the Nicene Fathers”

The Council of Constantinople indicated that it was defending the doctrine and creed of the Council of Nicea. The first “canon” (pronouncement) of the Council of Constantinople states: “That the faith of the 318 Fathers who assembled at Nicea in Bithynia, is not to be made void, but shall continue established; and that every heresy shall be anathematized, and especially that of the Eunomians...and that of the Arians...and that of

the Semiarians.”¹ The statement mentions other heresies too, but the Arian and semi-Arian heresies attack and minimize the doctrine of Christ's divinity.

The Council's letter to Emperor Theodosius I, summarizing the work it had done, also indicated that the Council was defending the doctrine and creed of Nicea: “Having then assembled at Constantinople...we...pronounced some short definitions, ratifying the faith of the Nicene Fathers, and anathematizing the heresies which have sprung up contrary to it.”²

The Arian response to Nicea

This ratification was necessary because the Arians, whose position was condemned at Nicea, did not submit to the outcome of the Council of Nicea. Whereas Nicea insisted that Christ was “of one essence with the Father,” the Arians said that Christ and the Father were two different beings, and that Christ was not God. In 335, at a council in Tyre attended only by Arian sympathizers, they condemned Athanasius, the great defender of the orthodox view that Christ is truly God. Another council permitted Arius to be received into the fellowship of the churches again.

The Arian supporters also drew up their own creeds, including The Dedication Creed (341) and The ‘Dated’ Creed (359).³ These creeds say many right things, even acknowledging that Christ was the only begotten of the Father before the world was created. The Dedication Creed even says that Christ is the “image of the deity” and the “essence of the Father.” The believing Christian who reads them might not quickly notice anything wrong with them. But one thing they did not say: Christ Himself was divine. That Christ is of the essence

1 “Canons of Constantinople, 381” in *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church AD 337-461*, ed. J. Stevenson, Rev. W. H. C. Frend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 135.

2 “Canons of Constantinople, 381,” 134.

3 These can be found in Henry Battenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 41-44.



Council of Constantinople, AD 381

of the Father did not mean, in the minds of those who signed this creed, that He was truly God.

One significant clue that these creeds did not fully express the truth about Christ is that the Arians readily signed them. Suppose that Reformed people drew up a creed about justification, which Roman Catholics readily signed; or regarding infant baptism, and Baptists could pen their names to it. Such a creed either denies the truth (probably subtly, maybe with only one word) or does not state the truth as precisely and oppose error as specifically as it ought. So it was with these Arian creeds.

So, whose position was correct, that of the Arians, or the defenders of Nicea? In the eastern half of the empire (with Constantinople as its center) the Arian position developed, while the western half (with Rome as its center) remained committed to Nicene orthodoxy. In other words, the division was both theological and geographical. In both respects, it threatened the unity of the empire. A council was needed to address the growing division.

The rise of semi-Arianism

Three parties were at the Council of Nicea: the Arians who denied that Christ is God; the orthodox who insisted that Christ is God; and a middle group that said Christ is similar to God. Those in the middle group

were reluctant to say that Christ was of the same being as God, because they could not reconcile this with the doctrine that God is one. Yet they did not agree with Arius, which is why they finally signed the Nicene Creed. But they remained convinced that Christ was *like* God and *similar* to God, and they thought that the Nicene Creed could be interpreted according to their view.

These semi-Arians continued to promote their view after the Council of Nicea closed.

In promoting their view, they found that the Arians would not compromise with them: the Arians were committed to their position. At the same time, some of them began to see a distinction between God's being and His persons, and began to realize that Christ could share God's essence but be a distinct person. Nicea had not considered this distinction between God's being and persons. As the church continued to develop the distinction between God's being and persons, it became clear that a council would be necessary to state this truth officially.

Conclusion

This is not the whole story. As noted in the introduction, other theological issues were being discussed. In addition, this article has not treated the role of the emperors in the theological debate. Constantine's death in AD 337 marked the end of a politically stable era, and succeeding emperors took different positions on the theological issue. This allowed the Arian party to advance at one time, the semi-Arian at another, and the Nicene position to rise and fall in the emperor's favor.

Although it is not the whole story, this is enough of the story to demonstrate one reason why the Council of Constantinople was necessary.



God's wondrous works

Rev. James Laning, pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa

God's sure promise

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2020, p. 309.

The previous article spoke of God promising deliverance to His covenant people. In this article we consider that the promise of our God is sure. It does not depend upon us for its fulfillment. Our salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace.

The promise of God

It is common to hear people speak of God "offering" salvation. The Canons of Dordt speak of Christ being "offered" in the gospel (Canons III/IV, Art. 9). The Canons, however, use the word *offer* in a different sense. What the Canons state and what most today are saying is not the same. The English term *offer* comes from a Latin word that means *to bring to* or *to bring before* and can be used in more than one sense. It can mean:

- 1) To bring before, present, or set forth
- 2) To exhibit a readiness or a desire to do something

When the Canons speak of Christ being "offered" in the gospel, it is using the word in the first sense. It means that Christ is *set forth* when the gospel is preached.

Many today, however, are using the term *offer* in the second sense. When they speak of God "offering" salvation, they mean that God in the preaching of the gospel *expresses His desire to save* all human beings.

Thus they are using the term to state something that is not true. God has made very clear that He desires to save only some. There are certain people whom He has unconditionally chosen to save. For them Christ died and in them God works faith. The very next article (Canons III/IV, Art. 10) says that God has "chosen His own from eternity in Christ" and that He confers faith and repentance upon them in distinction from others.

When we preach the gospel, we proclaim God's *promise*: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (I John 2:25). To offer (speaking of the term now only in the second sense listed above) and to promise are clearly different. To promise is to assure someone that you will do something.

When God promises salvation to someone, He is stating not only what He desires to do but what He certainly will do. It is certain that all those to whom God promises eternal life will live forever with Him. The reception of what God promises does not depend upon the recipient.

God's promise is unconditional.

It is also particular.

God's promise to the elect

God's promises are not to all human beings. They are only to those with whom God has established His covenant.

God's promise of salvation is His *covenant* promise. It is only to His covenant people. The setting apart of Israel as God's holy people illustrated in the old dispensation that God's covenant promise is to a particular people, His *chosen* people.

It is true that not all the blood descendants of Jacob were God's covenant people. There were many who were born in Israel who spiritually were not Israelites. As the Spirit says, "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). It is also true that there were some who were not born in Israel who were nevertheless true Israelites. We think of Rahab and Ruth, for example. The point here is that God's elect people are the recipients of His promise.

More specifically, Scripture tells us that God's promises are to Christ and those chosen in Him. In Galatians 3 we read that Christ is the one seed of Abraham and that He is the recipient of all that was promised: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). The text says there are not many seeds of Abraham, but one seed of Abraham. That one seed is Jesus Christ, and all the covenant promises were made to Him.

Later in that chapter God goes on to say that what is promised to Christ is promised also to all those who are in Christ. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

God's covenant promises are to Christ and those in Him. The promises of God are *particular* promises to a *particular* people.

Many deny this. They say God's covenant promise is conditional and that it is with more than the elect. Those two teachings do go together: the teaching that God's promise is conditional and the teaching that the covenant is with more than the elect. Scripture, however, teaches that God's promise is unconditional and that it is with the elect alone.

God's covenant confirmed

God's unconditional covenant has been confirmed. It was confirmed by Christ's death. Scripture teaches that Christ has become the Surety and Mediator of a better, that is, the new covenant, and that a testament is of force where death has occurred (Heb. 7:22; 9:15, 17; Canons II, Error 2).

A person's last will and testament states who will receive his/her possessions when he/she dies. All that is necessary for that document to be in force is the death of the person whose testament it is. God refers to His covenant as a testament. For it to be of force Christ's death was required. Since that death has taken place, the covenant is of force and all those for whom Christ died are certain to receive the promised inheritance. Nothing else is required. The salvation we receive is entirely a gift. It is a gift just as an inheritance is a gift.

We are reminded and assured of this when we have the Lord's Supper. Our Lord when He instituted this sacrament referred to the cup as "the new testament in my blood" (Luke 22:20). By calling it not just "my blood" but "the new testament in my blood," He directed our attention to the new covenant being confirmed by His death.

We make a reference to this in our Lord's Supper Form:

He cried out with a loud voice, My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me? (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34) that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken of Him; and finally confirmed with His death and shedding of His blood the new and eternal testament, that covenant of grace and reconciliation, when He said: It is finished (John 19:30).

What a comfort to know that our Lord has confirmed the new covenant! The blessings He purchased we have already begun to receive, and the full reception of all that He has promised is certain.

Faith and obedience included in the promise

Some may respond to this and say, "But does not God call us to believe in Christ?" We answer that He certainly does. But faith is included in the blessings God promises His people.

Faith itself is part of the gift of salvation. We refer to this in the Canons of Dordt:

...it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death (Canons II, Art. 8).

Christ purchased for us the gift of faith. He also produces in us not only the will to believe, but the act of believing also. He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Faith and obedience are not conditions we fulfill to be saved. Rather, they belong to the gift of salvation that Christ purchased for us, His people.

What a comfort we have in Christ Jesus, our Lord! The promise of God is sure. We have no doubt that we will receive all that our Lord has promised us. With thankfulness to our God may we daily follow Him, joyfully bearing our cross and cleaving unto Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love.

When God promises salvation to someone, He is stating not only what He desires to do but what He certainly will do. It is certain that all those to whom God promises eternal life will live forever with Him. The reception of what God promises does not depend upon the recipient. God's promise is unconditional. It is also particular.



Go ye into all the world

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

Love for the truth on the mission field

One of the joys of serving as a missionary in the Philippines is to see and hear firsthand the love for the truth that the Lord kindles in the hearts of His people. The zeal that is displayed by those who are new to the precious truths of God's Word is often contagious. And admittedly, sometimes it even serves as a silent rebuke to us whose interest has often waned and whose light has at times grown dim. Their confession of the truth warms our hearts, especially when this confession is made in the midst of afflictions, such as typhoons, flooding, death of loved ones, and now specifically the coronavirus. What follows is a taste of what I'm referring to. I will let the quotes speak for themselves. May they warm your hearts as well. And may they also, by God's grace, serve to reignite our own zeal and love for God's marvelous truth.

When I was in Arminianism, we were never taught that Christ interceded for our salvation because, if that is so, why would we always need to maintain our salvation? What is tiring in Arminianism is you have to "work" for your salvation. It is extremely tiring. I wondered why God is like that? I did so many "good things" (just to meet that requirement), but what if I unexpectedly died and at that time my love waxed cold and I didn't have the chance to do something about it? I tried and tried because I didn't want to end up in hell. So I praise God for redeeming me not only from my sin but also from heresy. When I first heard TULIP, that God sounded more powerful and sovereign than the god I used to know. That is amazing truth! Sadly, the Arminian god gives no assurance of salvation.

Arminians don't realize how weak their god is. It seems like not the God of the heavens and earth. Not Lord, but a weak person who begs. They always think that the decision is in their hands. That's why when they pray they always "claim it" would happen. It seems like they are always the boss and God would just nod on all their petitions. I think it's because they started and understood it all wrong.

As I grew up, I did so many sinner's prayers to accept Christ every time there was an altar call because I wanted to make sure that that prayer would be enough for my name to be written in the book of life. There's always no assurance. It's really tiring because I put my salvation in my own hands. It's only in the Reformed faith that I learned God is almighty and immutable.

In the Pentecostal church, they always tell people to put in money because that is their seed to God and that seed will grow and the Lord will bring it back a hundredfold. They provoke people to covet and to commit idolatry by pressure to give tithes and offerings. I can't imagine why God called me out from among them. It's only by grace in Christ, which I really don't deserve.

I could foolishly say my brother-in-law's death was bad timing, but I now know that everything, even death and corporate grief experiences, are according to God's time and purpose and for the benefit of His children. The Reformed view has been a real blessing because it makes the Word of God real comfort and not just plain rhetoric.

I praise God for the very simple yet so profound and powerful preaching of Philippians 1:21-23 at my mother-in-law's funeral. My wife's family and in-laws were unanimous that they were kept awake by the Spirit of God through the depth of your simple exhortation. The message is evidence of God's love and faithfulness to me and my family. God made our hearts glad.

Thanks to the Lord for the truths preached about the tenth commandment. I was struggling. I was even starting to ask God why I am lacking material things. My high school friends enjoy a lot of earthly things. I was jealous. I was really upset. But praise God I feel free now. I know God has opened my eyes for me to see the true value of life. I am relieved now.

The president is saluting doctors who are dying because of COVID-19 and governments are working hard to fight the virus. But I feel that being a covenant mother

is harder. It's non-stop work, especially protecting the children from spiritual viruses. There are non-stop viruses to combat. Physical and spiritual viruses. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Thanks for posting the speeches. I have done partial reading of all of them, but the realization of the truth in #3 (the sovereign work of God regarding good works in our salvation) blows me away. I hope I'm not disrespectful in expressing my thoughts. I praise God for keeping me still alive today to ponder on this truth. It's awesome truth. Wow. Truly so!

I am spending this vacation reading the literature of the PRCA. I've learned a lot from the books I've bought, like *Reformed Dogmatics*, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, and *Covenant and Election*. I want to be well grounded in Reformed teachings. This all gives me a renewed enthusiasm and passion now in my preaching and teaching.

If I may, I'd like to say a thing about overemphasizing God's sovereignty. No church, no doctrine, no one can overemphasize God nor His attributes. He is a great God, His greatness is beyond scrutiny or examination. We can't fathom or measure Him or know Him by observation. Even if we have memorized the Bible, the only source of true knowledge about God, I think we have not even scratched the surface of His greatness. Thus it is not possible to overemphasize His attributes such as His sovereignty. I frankly can say that this is the great disservice of the church (who honestly believe in God and the Bible) people in authority, not emphasizing

or under-emphasizing God and His attributes. We know God is one, and it follows in the context of sensible theology that all His attributes are one and are not separate or divided from each other.

Well, it might crack our head [to understand God], but that's the idea. Can we contain or know God 100% in our mind or senses or understand His ways or acts in creation? God is awesome. The best is to shut my mouth, hold the fingers, and be thankful that I know I'm the object of His great mercies.

The doctrine about God's sovereignty is a very personal matter to a Christian because it is where he/she derives his comfort, security, assurance, and peace, especially in this time of great affliction. If God is not fully in control, so that things and events like this happen by chance or randomly, then what is faith all about, and what is life all about?

This time (of coronavirus quarantine) is a difficult time even for one who is soaked in the Word of God. But I'm thankful because my soul has finally found relief and is no longer grasping for the right food after being fed poison for a long time. For that I again thank God.

The Lord is at work in His saints here. By His power they embrace His truth. By His wisdom they apply it to their lives. And gladly they confess: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of Hosts" (Jer. 15:16). What a beautiful thing!



Strength of youth

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of the Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana

Entitlement (2)

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2020, p. 285.

There you are, sitting straight up on the bed. The diagnosis was hard to hear. It is difficult even to focus as the doctor looks earnestly into your eyes. He is an honest man: your health condition, he says, is serious. But he will not dismiss you just yet. There's a prescription! As the doctor opens his mouth to tell you about it, you hang on his every word.

Last time, we, as it were, sat on the doctor's bed and listened to the diagnosis. We heard from the Word of God about a sin in our life: entitlement. Entitlement is an attitude of deservedness: a person *deserves* to have this or have that; it is a demanding of one's rights, a person has the *right* to do this or to have that. To put it simply, entitlement is an "I deserve, I have a right to"

attitude. We considered that there are four main sins that lie behind this sinful thinking: pride, ingratitude, selfishness, and covetousness.

This time, we continue to sit in that figurative doctor's office. We are eager to hear about the spiritual prescription for entitlement. We will not find this prescription in ourselves, in other people, in an institution, or in some self-help group; this prescription is found in the Word of God alone. God's spiritual prescription for this entitlement attitude is four Spirit-worked "opposites": *humility* (spiritual opposite of pride), *gratitude* (spiritual opposite of ingratitude), *selflessness* (spiritual opposite of selfishness), and *contentment* (spiritual opposite of covetousness).

Four spiritual opposites

The first spiritual opposite is *humility*. Humility is lowliness of mind and heart.

We are just creatures of the dust. The next time you go outside, get on your hands and knees in your lawn, and pluck out just one blade of grass. Hold it between your fingers and look at it for a while: just one blade of grass out of the trillions and trillions of others on this massive planet. Ponder this fact: you are no more than a blade of grass, so tiny, just here and gone. But now consider God, the Creator of this planet and every star; the Sustainer of every blade of grass; the all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing God. Know who you are and who He is. This is humbling.

More than this, we are sinful. For us, the redeemed and regenerated children of God, the old man is no longer on the throne—and for this we thank God! But we do carry that old man all the days of our life until we die. Also, our sins cover every corner of our life like stubborn grime, sins in thought, transgressions in words, evil in conduct. In fact, while there are many wicked things we do consciously, there are many perversities of which we are not even aware. God exposes our sin in the mirror of His law every Sunday morning, so that we can say within after each commandment is read, "That was *I* this week." To know our sin—that is humbling.

But God is gracious toward us! Grace is favor. This favor that God has on us is not something we earned from God, deserved from Him, or somehow put ourselves in a position to get from Him. It is *un-*

merited. We are sinners, totally unworthy of this favor, and deserve the fury of the thrice-holy God now and forever. God sees us not as we are in ourselves, but He sees us as we are in Jesus. God has favor upon us in Christ. Meditate on that! What breadth, what depth! Think of the saints of old: adulterer and murderer David, denier Peter, and persecutor Paul—but how amazing was the grace of God they experienced! Think of yourself: your own sin, the magnitude of which you cannot comprehend—but how sweet is the grace of God that you know! To know God's grace—that is humbling. Humility—the opposite of the pride in entitlement.

The second spiritual opposite is *gratitude*. Gratitude: a heart inflated with thanks to God. When the Lord works in us the knowledge that we are creatures of the dust, that we are sinners, and that we are saved by grace, this will not only humble us but also make us *thankful*. We are profoundly grateful for salvation, but

also we are deeply thankful for *all* of God's gifts to us. A thankful heart does not demand or expect. A thankful heart receives gladly and humbly what God gives of the things of this earth, understanding that these things are loaned by God for a time and ultimately belong to Him.

Gratitude leaves no room for a thankless, entitlement mindset.

The third spiritual opposite is *selflessness*. When we are keenly aware that we are lowly creatures, are sinners, and are recipients of the grace of God in Christ, our focus will shift from the inward to the outward. No longer will we ask, "What can *I* have?" But now, we will say, "What can I give to *others*, and do for *them*?" This selflessness is basic to the second table of God's law, our relationship toward the neighbor. Listen to what the Heidelberg Catechism has to say concerning our relationship with others, in connection with the possessions bestowed upon them: "But what doth God require in this commandment? That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may, and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others..." (Lord's Day 42, Q&A 111). This is Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Selflessness is God's contrasting prescription to the selfishness imbedded in entitlement.

A thankful heart does not demand or expect. A thankful heart receives gladly and humbly what God gives of the things of this earth, understanding that these things are loaned by God for a time and ultimately belong to Him. Gratitude leaves no room for a thankless, entitlement mindset.

The fourth spiritual opposite is *contentment*. Hebrews 13:5 is a beautiful passage on contentment: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” When the verse says, “Let your conversation be without covetousness,” this implies that there is such a thing as a conversation of covetousness. One’s conversation is his manner or way of life. A conversation characterized by covetousness is a life consumed especially by love for money. Let your life be *without* that covetousness! Furthermore, we are told to be *content* with such things as we have. Contentment is a satisfaction with what God has given to us. Contentment is to say, regardless of what we have or how much we have, “I have enough.” Then, notice how Hebrews 13:5 ends: “for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Our covenant Friend-Sovereign says that to us! So strong is this promise, that in Greek there are five negatives; a rough English translation is, “I will never, never leave you, and never, never, never forsake you.” That is God’s promise to us His covenant people. You see? No matter our circumstances in this life, even if we have very little, we truly have *everything*. Having God’s unchanging promise, we are content.

The One we need

Convicted of sin? We know our pride, ingratitude, selfishness, and covetousness. We know that we fall far short of the humility, gratitude, selflessness, and contentment to which we are called.

We need the One who is the total opposite of the entitled sinners that we are. Never was the proud, ungrateful, selfish, covetous ‘I-deserve’ attitude ever found within or expressed by Jesus. So opposite was He from all of that! The Son of God took to Himself man’s nature in the incarnation. In the incarnation, Jesus became *lowly and spiritually poor*. In the incarnation Jesus was lowly, for His divine glory and power, as the Son of God, did not so clearly manifest itself for a while. Jesus was spiritually poor, for to Him was imputed our sin. Jesus was spiritually poor, for not only did He bear

our sin, but He bore the wrath of God on account of our sin. No more clearly is that poverty and lowliness seen than at Calvary—how spiritually poor He became, descending into the horrors of God’s wrath! We need the Savior described in II Corinthians 8:9—“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.”

But there’s more to II Corinthians 8:9, and it reads this way: “...for your sakes he became poor, *that ye*

through his poverty might be rich.” Rich! So rich! We have been saved, delivered from hell! We have received the forgiveness of all our sins, and we have been declared righteous before God. And we are heirs of life and glory! When we shall open our eyes in glory, a glory that God has graciously laid up for us, then we will cry with the Queen of Sheba, “The half was not told [us]!” Even if you should heap up all the riches of all the ages into

one pile, that would not even begin to compare to these riches in Christ Jesus our Lord.

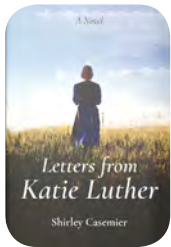
The Spirit of this Jesus Christ lives within you. Thankful for these riches in Christ, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we fight against pride, ingratitude, selfishness, and covetousness. Empowered by the Spirit of Christ, we can and will live humbly, gratefully, selflessly, and contentedly. Stumble often? Yes. Then we must repent of our sin and flee for refuge once again to the cross.

Bow your head, young person, and make this your prayer: *Father in heaven, we live in a world awash with entitlement. We find within us, and expressed by us, this same entitlement. Father, graciously pardon our iniquity, for Jesus’ sake. Grant to us Thy grace to fight against this sin. So work by Thy Spirit that we might live lives of thankfulness for the Savior who, though He was rich, yet for our sake became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. This we pray, in the Redeemer’s name alone. Amen.*



Bring the books...

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



Letters from Katie Luther: A Novel, by Shirley Casemier. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020. \$14.95. 208 pp. (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Ronald Cammenga.]

Letters from Katie Luther is a delightful book. It is a book written for young people by an author, who although in her eighties, is young at heart—very young at heart. Not only will young people profit from this book about the life of Katie Luther, but readers will learn much about her famous husband, the great Reformer Martin Luther. Through Katie's eyes, we are given insights that only a wife and mother could have.

Although a novel, *Letters from Katie Luther* is not a typical novel. Behind the book is a novel idea for a novel. Readers are not simply told the story of Katie Luther's eventful life. Instead, Katie herself tells us her life's story in the letters that she writes to her dear friend and sister in Christ, Ave von Schoenfeld Axt.

The story begins with the friends' escape, along with several other nuns, from the Roman Catholic convent at Nimbschen, Germany. With the others, Katie and Ave had become convinced of the truths of the Reformation. They had seen firsthand the corruption and errors within the Roman Catholic Church and they were determined to escape. They were determined to escape, even though they risked capture and the punishment for those who fled convents and monasteries. Ordinarily such a "crime" was punished by permanent expulsion from the church—execution. At the risk of death, Katie, Ave, and the other nuns were secreted out of the convent by the same man who put Reformation tracts into their hands, the merchant Leonard Koppe.

Many of the escaped nuns found shelter with relatives who were sympathetic to the Reformation. Others, though rejected by their families, were married to men who embraced the cause championed by Martin Luther. The last to be married, in part because she

was high-spirited and not afraid to express her views, was Katherine von Bora—Katie. Through a perplexing providence, which included her proposing to him rather than he to her, Katie became the bride of "Sir Doctor," as she respectfully and affectionately referred to her husband.

Letters from Katie Luther brings both Katherine and her famous spouse to life. Through the imaginative correspondence between Katie and Ave, we are given insights into both Katie's and Martin Luther's personalities. We are taken into their home and become part of the wider circle of friends and family who reside in the Black Cloister in Wittenberg. We are seated with them at the dinner table, enjoying the feast that Katie routinely made each evening. After the meal, we become a part of the lively conversations, asking our questions of and getting the viewpoint of the great Doctor. These are the conversations that later were compiled into Luther's *Table Talk*. Not infrequently, "Sir Doctor" solicited the opinion of his beloved wife; she always felt free to express her viewpoint on the topic of discussion.

But it is Katie, not "Sir Doctor," who is the main character of the novel. From Mrs. Casemier's book we learn so much about the great woman who stood behind the great man. We learn of her resolute determination to live out of her convictions. We learn of her overwhelming desire to be a godly wife and mother. As her husband spent himself in the cause of the Reformation, so she spent herself in all the duties that fell to her. She rose usually before the sun peeked over the horizon; and it was often much after dark before she laid her pig-tailed head on the pillow next to that of her husband. Among all the other terms of endearment by which he referred to her, Luther called her the "morning star of Wittenberg." We share in her joys, laughing with her in the humorous moments of life in the Black Cloister. We also weep with her in her heartbreaking sorrows, chief of which were bringing two of her children to the grave, as well as her beloved husband.

Throughout the book, Mrs. Casemier holds Katie up as a model to the young women and girls in the church today. She is a model especially in her devotion to what she considered her highest calling, the calling to be a godly wife and mother. She cooked and cleaned, changed diapers and did laundry, kept a garden and a fishpond in order to provide for her family. She is a model in the deep respect that she showed to her husband, which was evident in her usual reference to him as “Sir Doctor,” a title that parallels Sarah’s calling Abraham “lord” (I Pet. 3:6). Although she always felt comfortable to express her views, she was exemplary in her submission to her husband, as the church is subject to her head and husband, Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:23). Katie is a model also in her love for the church and her commitment to be a living member of the church. She is a model in the kindness that she showed to those in need.

And she is a model in the hospitality that she extended, which was often to complete strangers who appeared on the doorstep of the Black Cloister.

Through it all, Katie never viewed herself as a super

saint. She was a woman who struggled with doubts and fears. She was a woman of like passions, who was in all points tempted as every Christian woman is tempted. Throughout her life there was growth in sanctification. She was purified and strengthened, especially through the fiery trials that God brought upon her. “Slowly but surely Katie’s head knowledge became heart knowledge” (69). Through the highs and lows, the joys and the sorrows, the mountain tops and the dark valleys, she maintained unwavering trust in God. More than once, she was the means of God to deliver her husband from the depression with which he struggled throughout his life.

Through it all, Katie never viewed herself as a super saint. She was a woman who struggled with doubts and fears. She was a woman of like passions, who was in all points tempted as every Christian woman is tempted. Throughout her life there was growth in sanctification. She was purified and strengthened, especially through the fiery trials that God brought upon her.

Mrs. Casemier has written a gem! From the heart of one who knows young girls, especially through her years as a Christian schoolteacher, and who knows the calling of a Christian wife through her years of marriage to her godly husband, our hearts and minds are uplifted. Every young girl, teenager, and young mother ought to read

this book. Along the way, you will be reminded of the history of the Reformation—history worth being reminded of.

Highly recommended!



News from our churches

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

Thoughts for the times

They cried out, “Master, carest thou not that we perish? Jesus arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?” Excerpt from “Peace in the Storm,” a meditation by Rev. A. Spriensma.

Trivia question

How many PRCA congregations were organized before Georgetown PRC? Answer in the church profile section of this article. More trivia next time.

Minister activities

Due to circumstances in Singapore and the request of Covenant ERC to hold off calling a minister-on-loan,

the Council of Grandville, MI PRC has decided to withdraw the trio of Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. E. Guichelaar, and Rev. R. Kleyn for the time being.

First PRC in Edmonton, AB called Rev. E. Guichelaar (Randolph, WI). On May 31 he declined it.

Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN) announced a new trio from which to call a minister: Rev. M. DeBoer (Edgerton PRC), Rev. R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace PRC), and Rev. R. VanOverloop (Grace PRC). The congregation there called Rev. R. Kleyn to be their next pastor. On June 7 he declined this call.

Kalamazoo, MI PRC had formed a new trio consisting of Rev. C. Haak (Georgetown PRC), Rev. S. Key (Loveland PRC), and Rev. R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace PRC), and subsequently called Rev. C. Haak to be their next pastor. On June 14 he declined this call.

Rev. H. Bleyenbergh and his wife remain in West Michigan awaiting permission to move to Lacombe, AB so he can take up his ministry in Immanuel PRC. We pray that the Lord will soon open that door for them. In the meantime he continues preparing pre-recorded sermons for them, and has completed long-distance catechism lessons.

Rev. John Marcus and his family left Edmonton in May to live in West Michigan, as he awaits a call within the PRC.

Our home missionary, Rev. A. Spriensma, has begun writing short meditations for the PRC website (prca.org)—just for these present times and circumstances. Be sure to look them up and read them for your spiritual profit!

Young adult activities

Colorado Young Adult's Retreat in the Rocky Mountains, August 3-6: Registration opened on May 25 and was quickly filled! Pastors Key and Guichelaar will speak on II Timothy 1:7, as the young adults learn to be "Brave and Bold in the Faith."

Young people's activities

Lynden and Spokane Young People's Retreat is still planned for July 14-17, 2020, at Camp Sanders in Tensed, Idaho. The facility director thinks that the camp will be open and running by then. For registration information or other questions please contact Rev. Kleyn by email at r.kleyn@prca.org

Seminary news

Seminarian Josiah Tan and his family stayed in Singapore during the time of his mother's illness and death, which was also a time of lock-down here in the U.S. and there. He resumed and completed his classes on-line and assisted in 'speaking a word of edification' for his congregation (Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church). He returned in mid-June, so as to prepare for his seminary internship in First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) which began on July 1, D.V.

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

Church profile—Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI

By God's grace, Georgetown PRC just celebrated her 25th Anniversary in 2019. Currently a congregation of 154 families and 32 individuals, we began as a group of 34 families and 1 individual. Georgetown is the 26th congregation to be organized in our beloved Protestant Reformed denomination.

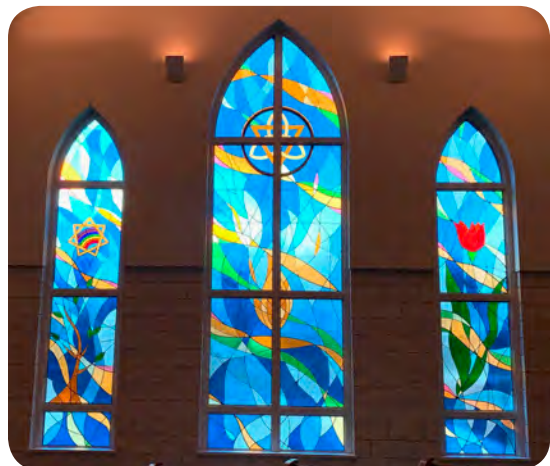
Our official organization took place on March 2, 1994 in the auditorium of Hudsonville PRC. On August 21, 1994 our first pastor, Rev. Ron VanOverloop, preached his inaugural sermon on Ephesians 4:19. The church began meeting first at Bauer Elementary and then moved to Heritage Christian School. The land at 7146 48th Avenue was not purchased until the early part of 1998. Over the next year, God blessed the work of

so many and a large and beautiful building was dedicated to the worship of the one true God on November 6, 1999. Five years later, after Rev. VanOverloop accepted a call to another church, Georgetown's second pastor, Rev. Carl Haak, preached his inaugural sermon on October 10, 2004. He remains our dear pastor today.

The congregation of Georgetown is made up of a wide variety of members. We have young families with many babies being baptized, as well as older families with many young people making confession of faith. We have several single and retired members as well. Many of the men work in the building trade or hold management positions in different fields of work. Others in our congregation are teachers, company owners,

or work in the medical field. We come together in many different groups to fellowship and learn God's Word—five Bible studies, catechism classes, young adults, adult and children's Sunday schools, a boys' GROW group, and a girls' SALT group. Every summer we have a Bible memory program for all ages, focusing on a different theme each year. Our Evangelism Committee hosts separate conferences for young men and young women to encourage them to walk strong in the Lord in their youth and to strive for holiness in all things.

The building of Georgetown PRC is adorned with seven beautiful windows designed to cause one to ponder the



wonder of the sacraments and the amazing grace afforded us through our Lord Jesus Christ. The windows on the north wall bear

symbols of the means of grace: the preaching of God's Word and the sacraments. The windows on the south wall bear symbols of the biblical and Reformed truths our denomination holds dear: the truth of the Trinity, the truth of the covenant, and the truths of the five points of Calvinism. A cross and two trumpets on the round window above the pulpit symbolizes the preaching of Christ crucified. One of the New Testament Greek words



translated "to preach" has the literal meaning of "to herald." Hence, the shape of the trumpets is that of herald trumpets.

In 2007 our congregation took over the care of a group of saints in Vellore, India that had been working with our sister church in Singapore. This work began when a man from Vellore named Paul Raj had come into contact with Rev. J. Kortering and went on to study in the Asian Reformed Theological School in Singapore. Paul Raj and his wife were also operating an orphanage in Vellore called Grace Foster Home. A committee of members from Georgetown was formed under the direction of our Consistory to begin this work. The committee's purpose was to help Paul Raj continue theological training and to provide financial support to him so that he could devote himself to the work of the ministry and assist with the upkeep of the foster home. In order to strengthen our relationship with and learn more about the group, a delegation was sent to Vellore in 2008. Since then, many more delegations have visited every year, Paul Raj has been ordained, and a church named the Protestant Reformed Church of Vellore has been formed. Pastor Paul Raj continues to minister to the congregation in Vellore and leads several Bible studies in the area. He also works with a group of medical students and professionals at Christian Medical College in Vellore. Recently, a major focus of Paul Raj has been to train other men in the truths of the Reformed faith in the hopes that God will lead more to labor in this growing field.

As a congregation, we are thankful for our place in a denomination that loves truth. Recently, in one of our Bible studies, we studied Paul's greeting to the church in Colosse found in Colossians 1. In his greeting he tells the church that he prays daily that they would "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This is our earnest prayer for ourselves as a church and for our denomination. We covet your prayers for us too.



Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Doon, IA PRC express our Christian sympathy to Teresa Aardema in the death of her father, **Donald Roy Aardema**. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, President
Perry VanEgdom, Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, at 8:00 A.M., in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 10, 2019.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Edgerton PRC on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 24, 2019. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Calvary's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Reminder

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

Coming this August!

Training Our Children for Dating and Marriage: A 31-Day Guide for Parents

A family devotional from
new author, Rev. Cory Griess

From the preface

“One of the most important decisions our children will make regards who they will marry. So much of their life is affected by this decision. And not only *their* life, but also the lives of their children and grandchildren. Even the future of the church is affected by this decision.”

Topics include

- ◆ What marriage is
- ◆ Who to look for, who to be
- ◆ Parental involvement
- ◆ The need for unity in doctrine and life

To order

call 616-457-5970

email mail@rfpa.org

visit rfpa.org



Reformed Witness Hour
reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. Audred Spruiensma

July 5 “Enoch Walks With God,” Genesis 5:22-24

July 12 “Finding Grace in the Eyes of the Lord,” Genesis 6:8

July 19 “A Smoking Furnace and a Burning Lamp,” Genesis 15:17, 18

July 26 “I Am Your God” Genesis 17:7