

The Standard Bearer

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When full, then bless and forget not

Rev. Ron VanOverloop

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**An update on the PCA's
response to *Revoice***

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of salvation**

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Meditation

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

When full, then bless and forget not

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and has built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”

Deuteronomy 8:10-14

The focus of the national holiday, called Thanksgiving Day, is primarily for the harvest of crops in the Fall of the year. The church of Jesus Christ uses this holiday as the occasion to thank God for the harvest.

Thanking God is a spiritual activity. It is a spiritual activity whether the thanks is for material and earthly matters or for spiritual matters.

In our text Moses is calling Israel to thank God for those blessings that are material. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell address at the Jordan River. He has led the children of Israel for forty years, out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Soon he will depart from them in death. But before he dies, he is used of God to say a few things to the nation.

In the first part of this chapter, Moses explains that during the forty years in the wilderness God had miraculously and wonderfully taken physical care of His people. By giving them manna from heaven and water from the flinty rock, God was teaching them humble reliance upon Him. He let them hunger and supplied them with manna so they might learn to live, not by bread alone, but by doing His will (vv. 2-4). They never lacked during the forty years, but it was only what they needed, just enough; there were no left-overs, no abundance.

God's purpose in so chastening His children was that they might keep His commandments, walking in His ways and in His fear (vv. 5, 6; cf. 6:24).

Now Moses informs them that God would continue

to teach them to heed His will, but in the way of an abundance of material things (v. 7). In sharp contrast, Israel would find Canaan to be a land of plenty. It was very fertile, often described as a land that flowed with milk and honey. They would find mature vineyards providing large bunches of grapes. They would find fields either with growing crops or crops ready to be harvested. The olive yards would be mature, already producing a great harvest. The barns would be filled with grain and hay. They would move into houses already built and furnished. They would find wells already dug. Their possessions would multiply, and their flocks and herds would multiply exceedingly. And they would find silver and gold.

For Israel, the prosperity of Canaan was a type of God's rich covenant blessings in Christ Jesus. Canaan's prosperity was a type of God's great favor of everlasting mercy and never-failing grace. In short, Canaan was a picture of heaven! Canaan pictured the fullness of the blessings of salvation in eternal glory.

It is the general experience in Western civilization that there is an abundance of material possessions. We have food in abundance, fine houses, nice vehicles, vacation days, and so much more. While we experience the reality that we always have the poor with us (Matt. 26:11), it is also true that the majority of us are not crying out for help because of desperate need. We are not watching our children starve, nor are we wondering from where tomorrow's meals are coming. But we have to be careful, because in the new dispensation earthly plenty does not typify God's blessing as it did in the old dispensation. We also have to learn how properly and rightly to use the material things God has given to us. We are taught that God gives both much or little in His love. And we are called to use and enjoy whatever God gives, for "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:4). "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (I Tim. 6:17b).

There are dangers that every sinner faces when it comes to prosperity. First, true thanksgiving is not natural to the old man of sin. This is because of the natural selfishness of the sinner. Natural man refuses to acknowledge God and His sovereign control over the distribution of earthly things. The natural man does not thank God nor glorify God as God (Rom. 1:21).

Second, it is so easy to forget God. This is Moses' great concern for Israel (v. 11). When we experience fullness and security, then the memory of the reality of God fades and is easily no longer the governing principle of our daily life. Spiritual forgetfulness is not simply a kind of absentmindedness, but a ceasing to think of the reality of the living God for a period of time. To judge ourselves to be rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing includes the absence of a conscious need for God. The wise man expressed concern about having riches, "lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD?" (Prov. 30:9). The prophet Hosea also spoke of the same problem later in the history of Israel: "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me" (Hos. 13:6). When we are not conscious of the great need for daily necessities, then we forget our God. Just as the healthy do not call for a doctor, so the rich think that they do not need help from the Almighty Giver; and those who do not confess their sins, think that they do not have a real need for the Savior. Often it is not that we deliberately forget Him, but that the lack of a conscious need of God occasions our lack of crying out for help.

Third, prosperity occasions the heart to be "lifted up" (v. 14). This is to exalt or to magnify oneself. Success in making money or in having money often leads to self-exaltation. It is very easy for prosperity to intoxicate ever so slowly, so that one trusts in riches rather than in the living God who gives the riches (I Tim. 6:17). The natural man wants to take credit for his prosperity, claiming that the riches came because of his strength and the fruit of the work of his hands. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (v. 17). When it is easy to obtain the things that we need (and more beside), then we tend to rely on ourselves and not on our God. A lifted-up heart is to be high-minded. It proudly claims for oneself success and prosperity.

The wise man is always aware of this inclination.

Moses explains that the danger of riches is not only that they will forget God, but especially they will "forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

The forgetting of which Moses warns is our not re-

membering from where we have come and what we deserve. That is why Moses adds, "the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." We forget that we have been miraculously and graciously delivered out of the poverty of sin's slavery and that we are still in the wilderness of this world's sinfulness. We forget that we were born naked, that we brought nothing into this world, and that everything we have has been given to us. Every measure of health is a gift from Jehovah our God, as is every penny, every article of clothing, and all our food and drink.

Therefore, the fullness and prosperity that God gives us come with callings. We are to thank God.

We are to thank Him by acknowledging, both publicly and privately, that we deserve nothing. We are to consider always that we have been greatly gifted by the Giver of all. We thank Him by seeing Him as the source of everything. We are especially to thank Him for the Unspeakable Gift—Jesus Christ! We are to thank Him for delivering us from the slavery of sin, miraculously preserving in us the regenerated heart and faith. We are to thank Him for daily guiding us through the wilderness of this life. And we are to thank Him for promising us the glorious inheritance of the heavenly Canaan.

We are to thank God by blessing Him when we sanctify, enjoy, and use the material possessions He has given to us. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:4, 5). We do this by striving to use our material possessions in a God-honoring way. We do this by sharing our material possessions with others and by using them to support kingdom causes.

We are to thank God by asking Him to forgive us whenever we forget Him, and when we are ungrateful.

And especially we are to thank God by striving to keep "His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes" in every part of our life (v. 11). The essential nature of forgetfulness is described as the failure to keep God's commandments. Positively, the thought of God's goodness in material and spiritual blessings is to be expressed in a gratitude that desires to thank God and to thank Him *His* way, not our way. God demands that He be thanked by obedience to His commandments, judgments, and statutes, that is, that we heed His will as given in His moral commandments, His civil judgments, and His ceremonial statutes. In grateful love we want to do, not only what *we* want to do, but what *God* wants us to do.



Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Herman Witsius: Still relevant

In the next few editorials we will be quoting Herman Witsius and offering some comments on those quotes.

Who was Herman Witsius? A renowned Reformed, Dutch theologian of the seventeenth century (1636-1708). He was a younger contemporary of the better-known theologians, Gijsbert Voetius and Johannes Cocceius—that is, better known to us.

In his day, Witsius was as well known and respected as either of those men for his piety and biblical learning. In fact, what added to his reputation was his attempt to reconcile Voetius and Cocceius in their bitter differences over various issues theological and political, though Witsius focused on the theological. What divided the two protagonists were issues such as to what extent the requirements of the ‘old’ covenant upon Old Testament believers differed from those of the ‘new’ covenant upon the New Testament saints; to what extent various precepts found in the Old Testament could yet be applied to the New Testament age; and, the validity of sabbath law with its strict observance for the New Testament era, and related matters.

So bitter and sharp was the controversy that it divided the Reformed churches of the Netherlands into camps—“I am of Voetius!” “Well, I am of Cocceius!”

Witsius, having an irenic character (known as a peace-maker), tried to mediate between the two, in some instances trying to find a middle-ground for their differences, and in other instances, to get one combatant to make some concession to the other. It was in vain. Loyal supporters of both men could be found in the Dutch churches long after the death of the two adversaries.

Why editorials on Witsius? The result of a book by Witsius recently brought to my attention, one written in response to a different controversy that was brewing in England. Its short title is, *Antinomians and Neonomians*. The longer title is *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions, on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*.¹

¹ Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807. First published in 1696 in Utrecht (the Netherlands).

The occasion for the book was controversy that had broken out in England among Protestants over various theological issues. Debated were such matters as the character of Christ’s hellish sufferings (Were they worse than that of reprobates?); the implication for Christ’s character due to man’s sin being imputed to him (Scripture states, after all, the Christ was “made sin for us”); whether faith is really even necessary for the elect to be saved (since they were, after all, united to Christ by the decree of election and eternally justified); whether repentance necessarily had to precede the remission of sins. To insist it must, would this not turn repentance into some kind of condition for and prerequisite to forgiveness (and so besmirch salvation all of grace)?²

And the list goes on.

But especially the controversy revolved around the question of the value of good works (labeled as the “utility of holiness”) and their relation to salvation and its assurance. It was around this point, as Witsius put it, that the controversy became especially “warm.”

Sound familiar?

There is nothing new under the sun. What we in our denomination are presently dealing with has pedigree, which is to say, historical precedence. And, as becomes clear from his little book, the irenic Witsius had deep, wise-hearted insight into the issues of the dispute he sought to mediate.

So sharp was the controversy in England amongst professing Calvinistic divines (theologians), and so divisive, that a number of English brethren appealed to their colleagues in the Netherlands. The ministers laid out, as best they could, the issues being controverted and dividing them. They pleaded with their Dutch counterparts to give their judgment on the divisive issues, hoping it would help their churches in England to resolve their controversies.

Not many responded.

We are informed that many of the Dutch divines thought some issues so speculative that answering would serve no useful purpose, and other issues so ba-

² To this last mentioned issue we will return next installment, with quotes that give the essence of Witsius’ response.

sic, so self-evident if one studied Scripture, that they did not warrant the time necessary to formulate a response.

Witsius, out of concern for his Protestant colleagues in England, knowing their sincerity and sympathetic to their distress, took the time to work through the issues and give his judgment on various of the controverted matters. The result was his little book entitled *Antinomians and Neonomians*. Originally written in Latin (as the universal language of the scholars of that age), it was translated into English in 1807 by the Rev. Thomas Bell, a Scottish Presbyterian pastor in Glasgow.

In his preface the translator indicates what brought the book to his attention, namely, its recommendation by a certain Rev. Hervey. Having given the name of Witsius' book, Hervey wrote:

A choice little piece of polemical divinity, perhaps the very best that is extant. In which the most important controversies are fairly stated, accurately discussed, and judiciously determined, with perspicuity of sense, and a solidity of reasoning, exceeded by nothing, but the remarkable conciseness, and the still more remarkable candor of the sentiments.³

High praise, indeed; Witsius judged to be a Dutch theologian who was discerning and fair, clear, solid in reasoning, and concise.

And concise he was, as will become clear when we begin lifting some quotes from his little book. Mr. Bell read the book, agreed with Hervey's assessment, and decided it was applicable not only to the seventeenth-century controversy but also deserved a wide reading in the nineteenth-century English-speaking church world as well. Doctrinal antinomianism was not a species that had become extinct.

He prepared it for publishing.

And so we have the English edition of Witsius' treatise *Antinomians and Neonomians*.

Witsius' book is divided into seventeen chapters. Each chapter is introduced by a brief synopsis of what issue of the controversy Witsius was addressing, usually by Witsius giving his argument in summary form.

To give our readers a sense not only of how judicious and concise Witsius was, but also how solidly orthodox (Calvinistic) he was, we offer some quotes lifted from chapter 4. First we quote from his synopsis, and then lift quotes from the chapter itself, as Witsius sets forth his response in greater detail.

II. It is unjustly asserted that Christ purchased salvation absolutely for the elect, upon a condition to be performed by men. III. [This is so], [s]ince he purchased salvation absolutely for the elect, with all things pre-requisite to it.

IV. Which is proved from 2 Cor. V. 19. V. And from the right which Christ procured to himself over the elect. VI. And from his efficacious [almighty, irresistible] will to claim them to himself. VII. Finally from this, that [Christ] purchased for his people not only the remission of sins, but also faith and sanctification.⁴

Take note of Witsius' theology as set forth in the first assertion quoted (II.).

Witsius rejects the notion that Reformed theologians can speak of some condition a man must perform to receive salvation, while at the same time holding to the doctrine of election, that is, claiming to maintain that Christ purchased salvation for the elect in the *absolute* sense of the word. It is either/or. Either Christ purchased salvation for the elect absolutely and fully, or He did not. For one claiming to maintain that Christ did so while at the same time insisting that, in the preaching, one must declare that a man's salvation still hinges on some condition he must first satisfy, involves one in a theological contradiction. Both cannot be true.

By bringing into the preaching a condition that man must first fulfill, one has undermined and, by implication, denied the truth of eternal election. As well, one has, by implication, denied that Christ fully accomplished what He set out to do; that is, one denies the efficacy of Christ's redemptive work. One is guilty of contradicting himself.

Such is Witsius' assertion.

Neither would Witsius have been happy with a Reformed theologian speaking of salvation in terms of having to satisfy certain 'prerequisites.'

Why?

Because, as he states in assertion III, Christ purchasing the fullness of salvation for the elect means He also purchased "all things pre-requisite to it," which is to say, the things necessary for salvation to be granted to the elect sinner. And what those things include are spelled out in VII: "...not only the remission of sins, but also faith and sanctification."

Away with the notion of preaching that speaks of obtaining one's personal salvation in terms of one needing to satisfy certain 'prerequisites'.

Sound familiar? To those familiar with the history of the PRC, it should.

If Witsius had lived in the twentieth century and been familiar with the conditional covenant controversy that swept through our churches, whom do you suppose he would have supported and whose theology would he have opposed? The above assertions should make that plain. When it came to salvation and being a rightful

³ *Antinomians*, 11.

⁴ *Antinomians*, 53.

member of God’s covenant, Witsius was of the ‘unconditional’ variety.

According to Witsius, the terms “condition” and “prerequisites” were not terms to be used when it came to speaking of being saved by Christ, which was a matter of His sovereign, free, irresistible grace.

In the chapter itself, in the section with the heading “It is unjustly asserted that Christ purchased salvation, upon a condition to be performed by men,” Witsius writes,

...[L]et us see what fruit redounds to the elect from the finished obedience of Christ. And here they by no means obtain my assent, who think that Christ by taking our sins upon him, and satisfying for them, purchased our reconciliation unto God, and therefore eternal life, only upon condition [!], that then only can that merit have its effect in us, *if we believe* [emphasis added]; so that the possibility of our salvation is purchased by Christ, but the salvation itself remains to be communicated by God the supreme Lord, to whom he thinks fit, and upon what conditions he shall be pleased to prescribe.⁵

Later, in connection with the certainty of the salvation of the elect, Witsius writes:

For why should [Christ] not actually claim to himself those whom he bought with so great a price? Unless we suppose that he cannot accomplish it, without hurting the liberty of the human will. For in reality, this rock [of error] is known to be the shipwreck of many. But we know that the Spirit of Christ is possessed of such

⁵ *Antinomians*, 54.

a power to change the heart and soul, that he can make those who were formerly the slaves of the devil, cheerfully receive Christ for their Lord, and cleave to him with the most free and the most constant assent of the will. Let us hear Christ himself: John. X.16. “I have also other sheep which are not of this fold; and *them I must bring*, and they shall hear my voice.” Because these sheep were his by *right*, therefore it behoved him to claim them in fact. And he knew he could effectuate that by his grace, which maketh willing: *They shall hear my voice* (emphasis throughout—Witsius).⁶

And then this:

VII. It is also to be considered that [Christ] is said to have purchased for his elect, not only the possibility of the remission of sins, but remission itself (Matt. 26:28, Eph. 1:7) and not on condition, only that they believe, but also the drawing of the Father, and grace that they may believe.... He purchased salvation for the elect, not on condition only that they take a pleasure in the constant study of holiness, but he also purchased sanctification, as a part to salvation, [which purchase] necessarily preced[ed] its consummation... (Titus 2:14).⁷

Having set forth the orthodoxy of Witsius, we turn next to other issues of dispute as answered by Witsius, but especially to his assessment of and response to issues dealing with the value of good works and their relation to salvation and its experience, its personal ‘possession.’

⁶ *Antinomians*, 57.

⁷ *Antinomians*, 57.

Letters

The will of the regenerate man

I read Prof. Cammenga’s articles in the April 15 and June 2020 *Standard Bearer* entitled “Of free will, and thus of human powers” with interest, but disagree with his teaching that regenerated man “has the freedom of his will restored” so that he, quoting the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC), “wills and is able to do the good of its own accord” (*SB*, June, p. 399).

Man does “willingly” will sin in his second stage of his “own accord,” but Prof. Cammenga and the SHC confuse the truth of this matter by calling such a willingness “free” (*SB*, April 15, p. 329). In all four stages¹ man remains a rational, moral, and “willingly” willing creature, so such willingness to will the good in the third regenerated stage

¹ The writer refers to the four “states” of man (the more common term and the one used by Prof. Cammenga) which are: 1. as originally created; 2. as fallen; 3. as redeemed and renewed; 4. as glorified. These distinctions go all the way back to the church father Augustine.

certainly cannot be that which may be said to be a freedom that is “restored,” nor is it the freedom that Prof. Cammenga teaches is restored.

Prof. Cammenga teaches one legitimate sense in which the freedom of man’s will is restored, namely, that his will is freed from being “enslaved to sin” (*SB*, June, p. 399). However, he then erroneously teaches that that freedom gives regenerate man a will that is then free to will and do the good “of its own accord” (*SB*, p. 399). Such teaching contradicts the Canons of Dordt (III/IV, Art. 14), which explicitly teaches that freedom from the bondage of sin does not result in regenerate man being free also to will and do the good of his will’s “own accord”:

Faith is therefore to be considered as a gift of God, *not...even* because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should *by the exercise of his own free will*, consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ; *but* because *He who works* in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, *produces both the will to believe and the act of believing* also [emphasis added].

By stating that the faith of man in the third regenerated stage is not “by the exercise of his own free will,” the Canons explicitly teach that faith is not of man’s will’s “own accord,” but of God’s will and power. This truth about faith must also be clearly taught then of good works that are “only those which proceed from a true faith” (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 33) in both this and the life to come, so that good works too are not of regenerate man’s will’s “own accord,” but only by God’s power and according to His will. “Of its own accord” may not be applied to the regenerated man in Christ inasmuch as regenerate man only ever wills the good in accord with Christ his Head’s will, as guided by His Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of Life” (Nicene Creed). Man’s will after the Fall is only ever bound either to willingly will sin (always in the second stage, and when acting “of its own accord” in the third stage) or bound to willingly will and do only the good (third stage only in principle and fourth stage, when under the regenerating and life-giving influence of the Spirit).

To maintain that regenerate man can will and do the good of his will’s “own accord,” Prof. Cammenga must either deny the total depravity of the regenerated man’s old man, or deny the headship of Christ over his new man, which is akin to teaching that a body can willingly will and do anything apart from its head.

Mr. Charles C. Doezema
Walker, MI

Response:

As brother Doezema rightly points out, he does not so much disagree with me but with the Second Helvetic Confession. This is extremely presumptuous. The SHC is not merely the personal confession of Heinrich Bullinger, any more than the Belgic Confession of Faith is the personal confession of Guido de Brès. It was one of the most widely acclaimed confessions of the Reformation era. Reformed churches throughout Europe, including our Dutch forebearers, as well as Presbyterians of Scotch-Irish descent, subscribed to the SHC. That widespread subscription was in large part due to the confession’s strong repudiation of the heresy of free will and its clear articulation of the positive teaching of Scripture concerning the renewal of the will in the regenerate.

To begin with, brother Doezema takes issue with the teaching that in regeneration the will of man is “restored” (cf. “Letter,” paragraphs 1 and 2). But he is not only taking exception to the SHC; he is also taking exception to the Canons of Dordt. More than once, the Canons speak of the renewal of the will in those who are regenerated. Canons III/IV, Article 11 teaches that in regeneration God “infuses new qualities into the will.” In the same head, Article 12 speaks explicitly of the renewal of the will: “Whereupon the will thus re-

newed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active.” Article 16 goes on to speak of regeneration “in which the true and spiritual *restoration* and freedom of our will consist.” In reality, brother Doezema is rejecting not only the teaching of the SHC, but the teaching of the Canons of Dordt. If the SHC “confuse[s] the truth of the matter,” as he alleges, so does also the Canons of Dordt—a most serious position.

That the work of regeneration includes the renewal of the will has always been the teaching of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is not only the Reformed tradition, but this is Protestant Reformed tradition. In the same paragraph in which Homer C. Hoeksema insists that the grace of God “does not abrogate the responsibility of the Christian,” and that “God does not believe and repent for him,” he writes:

God never violates the work of his creation and the nature of man. In the execution of his good pleasure he never interferes between the heart, will, and mind of a man and the actions of that man. On the contrary, the act of faith and repentance proceeds from the will of the man. He believes and repents, but he does so only by virtue of the grace received. God renews him. God actuates and influences that *renewed will*, and in consequence of that infallible and effectual influence, *the renewed will* also acts. Man is rightly said to believe and repent. (*The Voice of our Fathers*, p. 323; emphasis added.)

Brother Doezema also rejects the SHC’s statement that the regenerated will both wills and does the good “of its own accord” (cf. “Letter,” paragraphs 3, 4, and 5). The complete sentence in the SHC is: “And the will itself is not only changed by the Spirit, but it is also equipped with faculties so that it wills and is able to do the good of its own accord.” In support of his rejection of speaking in any sense of the renewed will willing the good “of its own accord,” brother Doezema quotes Canons III/IV, Article 14. But his understanding of this article of the Canons is wrong. The article is repudiating the error of free will, a capacity of the natural man in himself and apart from regeneration, by which a man “consent[s] to the terms of salvation and actually believe[s] in Christ.” This is precisely the same error that the SHC is rejecting in chapter 9. To allege that the SHC is contradicting itself, giving back with the left hand what it has taken away with the right hand, is mistaken.

When the SHC refers to the will “of its own accord,” it is not talking about an innate capacity of the will of fallen man, but of the will renewed through regeneration, as the sentence in which the expression occurs makes plain. It is speaking of the will as it has been “changed by the Spirit.” The will thus “changed by the Spirit” actually and actively wills, which is the function

of the will. Even then, the regenerated man's will does not will the good apart from the grace of God, as the SHC indicates by its quotations of Jeremiah 31:33, John 8:36, Philippians 1:29 and 2:13. But the point is that as a fruit of the work of grace, the will of the regenerated believer does indeed will the good. The statement in this paragraph of the SHC parallels the statement in Canons III/IV, Article 12 that "man is *himself* rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received." The Canons do not mean to teach that man *in his own strength* believes and repents. That would be a distortion of the teaching of the Canons, which insists that we believe, repent, and will the good as the result of God's sovereign, efficacious grace. But the fruit of grace is that man himself does indeed repent and believe. Just so, the renewed will *as renewed* does "of its own accord" will that which is good and pleasing to God. That the renewed will does indeed actively will, choose, and do that which is good, the SHC will insist upon in the next paragraph of chapter 9, the exposition of which can be found elsewhere in this issue of the *Standard Bearer* (p. 90). God does not will for us and instead of us, but we actively and consciously will.

This is Scripture. Paul says in Romans 7:18, "For to will is present in me." In verse 19 of the same chapter, he speaks of "the good that I would," that is, "the good that I will," as well as "the evil that I would not," that is, "the evil that I do not will." And in verse 22 he says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." To be sure, it is gospel truth that it is God who works in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." But the fruit of God's work in us is that we will and do His good pleasure.

What brother Doezema means when he speaks of "the headship of Christ over his new man" ("Letter," paragraph 5) is unclear. This is a puzzling and confusing expression. Christ is *our* Head, not simply the head of our new man. This is not a biblical or confessional expression. And it is dangerous. It comes perilously close to teaching that as our Head, Christ wills and chooses *for* us, rather than that we will and choose, and that we are called to will and choose. Brother Doezema further insists "that good works too are not of regenerate man's will's 'own accord,' but only by God's power and according to His will" ("Letter," paragraph 4). In his mind, it is one or the other. Good works "are not of regenerate man's will," but "only by God's power and according to His will." The biblical teaching, however, is that God works in us so that we both will and do His good pleasure. By denying that *the regenerate* will the good and do the good, brother Doezema is making the same kind of error as saying that Noah did not build the ark. It is the error of contending that either God built the ark or Noah built it, rather than Noah by the grace of God working in him. And both these denials are symptomatic of antinomianism, which denies the "can" and the "must" of good works because it fears that good works then somehow contribute to our salvation. Where the "can" is repudiated for the regenerated believer, the denial of the "must" is not far behind. Antinomianism in all its forms is a grievous error that the Reformed faith recognizes and repudiates. It is an error that the Protestant Reformed Churches must guard against and reject in all its forms.

Prof. Ronald Cammenga



All around us

Rev. David Noorman, pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan

An update on the PCA's response to *Revoice*

Despite the postponement of the 48th General Assembly (GA) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) to next summer, the PCA's Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality released its report in May, citing the fact that they were "commissioned to engage in this study due to pressing needs in our church and society."¹

This committee's report is the PCA's response to the 2018 *Revoice* Conference.

For those not familiar with *Revoice*, it is not only the name of a conference but also an active organization, whose mission is "to support and encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other same-sex attracted Christians—as well as those who love them—so that all in the Church might be empowered to live in gospel unity while observing the historic Christian doctrine of mar-

¹ Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality, p. 1. The full text is available online: <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf>.

riage and sexuality.”²

Revoice came to the attention of the PCA’s GA in connection with Greg Johnson, his session, and presbytery; Johnson is a minister in the PCA who is involved in *Revoice*, and identifies himself as a “gay Christian.” Those desiring more information and insight into this matter may refer to Rev. Clay Spronk’s article concerning the controversy in this rubric last year.³ Now that the committee’s report has been released, it is worth revisiting the matter.

The “pressing needs”

The PCA’s committee released the report citing “pressing needs in our church and society.” Essentially two needs were kept in view, an apologetic need and a pastoral need.

The committee was given an apologetic mandate, namely, to “suggest ways to articulate and defend a biblical understanding of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism in the context of a culture that denies that understanding.”⁴ This is certainly a worthy endeavor.

The culture of the day regards the biblical view of marriage and human sexuality to be restrictive and oppressive bigotry, and the world does not hesitate to vilify Christians who defend biblical views as unloving and intolerant. In the face of such a culture, the Christian’s calling is not only to stand firm in the faith that he has received, but also to be ready to give an answer (apology or defense, I Pet. 3:15). Help is always welcome for Christians facing these attacks, and the report provides a solid, biblical defense.

The other “pressing need” the PCA sought to address is the pastoral need. Recognizing the wholehearted inclination of man toward all kinds of sin, the pressing pastoral need is that Christians might be equipped to bring biblical counsel to those inclined to the particular sins of same-sex attraction in its many forms. *Revoice*, however, is an unbiblical attempt to minister to those struggling with same-sex attraction because the “support and encouragement” that the gospel might afford to such individuals must not include an affirmation of an LGBT identity, such as “gay Christian” or “bisexual Christian.” Rather, it must in-

clude a call to reject that identity, reckoning ourselves “dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). *Revoice* does not reject, but affirms and supports a Christian’s identification with these sinful desires.

The PCA recognized this error of *Revoice* (at least indirectly), and the committee’s report is an attempt to set forth a biblical and confessional approach for ministering to those who struggle with same-sex attraction. Also for the pastoral need, the committee gives good help.

The need for apologetic and pastoral help in the realm of human sexuality is undeniable; but the most pressing need has not been addressed to this point. I must echo the concern of Rev. Spronk that the PCA’s most pressing need is the need to exercise Christian discipline with those who maintain unbiblical doctrines and practices.⁵

No recommendations

It is disappointing, but not surprising, that the committee’s report includes no recommendations for how the PCA might address the concrete case of *Revoice* and the officebearers involved in that organization. It remains to be seen whether the 48th GA might receive this report and apply it concretely. Significantly, there are overtures that await the next GA calling for that kind of action.

From a certain point of view, the committee should not be faulted for the absence of any recommendations, since the committee was not mandated to bring any. No doubt there is wisdom in staying within the bounds of the mandate. To the committee’s credit, the report gives evidence that they took their mandate seriously and carried it out thoroughly and thoughtfully.

In the report, however, the committee gives a different, somewhat surprising explanation for the lack of recommendations:

Knowing that some have anticipated that our report will divide and polarize our church with recommendations that will try to press certain perspectives on others, we have made no recommendations. The PCA asked the members of this Committee to study these issues, and to express our understanding, and we have.... Still, we believe that our best service to the church will not be given by trying to leverage actions with recommendations, but asking that our church’s leaders experience what we have on this Committee by listening with respect to what the Lord may intend to teach from

2 <https://revoice.us/about/our-mission-and-vision>.

3 Rev. Clay Spronk, “The Messenger Matters; Another Irrelevant Debate and Decision in the PCA,” *Standard Bearer* (September 15, 2019): 490-492. Rev. Spronk gives some background into the broader controversy in the PCA on these issues (that is, “Side A” and “Side B”). In addition, the references in his article provide a good introduction to both sides of the controversy.

4 Report, p. 1.

5 Rev. Spronk points out that the appointment of this committee signals another failure of the PCA to exercise Christian discipline with those who will not repent of unbiblical doctrines and practices.

those who have sought to honor his Word and each other in this Report.⁶

In light of the mandate, the committee's approach is understandable. The committee's desire, that the truth speak for itself, is honorable. But is it practical? Will a report alone remedy or avoid this anticipated division and polarization? And, provided that the "certain perspectives" in the report are biblical and confessional perspectives, why is there any hesitancy to try to "press" them upon the denomination through recommendations to the GA? Overall, the report is solidly grounded in Scripture and the confessions, which makes it even more disappointing that such a perspective likely will not be pressed upon the PCA as a whole.

A valuable resource

There is reason to be encouraged by the content of this committee's report on human sexuality.

The report as a whole is quite lengthy (60 pages), but the sum and substance of it is contained in the first 13 pages, which consists of a preamble and twelve clear and concise statements. The "Twelve Statements" state the committee's conclusions and are aimed at an audience of lay members, while the rest of the report gives a more comprehensive explanation. The full report also includes an instructive and detailed essay that sets forth the biblical perspective of human sexuality over against the sexual ethic of the world, as well as an annotated bibliography of resources for further study on topics related to human sexuality and same-sex attraction.

The form of the Twelve Statements is deliberately pastoral: "Each statement is dual, an associating of one truth with a concomitant truth or teaching.... The paired truths help the pastor to avoid the opposite errors of either speaking the truth without love, or trying to love someone without speaking the truth."⁷ The topics range from broad concepts applied to the issue of same-sex attraction (such as marriage, the image of God, and original sin) to more specific topics (such as identity, that is, "gay Christians" and language, that is, "gay").

Consider Statement #4, for example, on the subject of desire:

We affirm not only that our inclination toward sin is a result of the Fall, but that our fallen desires are in themselves sinful (Rom 6:11-12; I Pet. 1:14; 2:11). The desire for an illicit end—whether in sexual desire for a person of the same sex or in sexual desire disconnected

from the context of biblical marriage—is itself an illicit desire. Therefore, the experience of same-sex attraction is not morally neutral; the attraction is an expression of original or indwelling sin that must be repented of and put to death (Rom. 8:13).

Nevertheless, we must celebrate that, despite the continuing presence of sinful desires (and even, at times, egregious sinful behavior), repentant, justified, and adopted believers are free from condemnation through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21) and are able to please God by walking in the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-6).⁸

This is sound biblical counsel in form and content. The form is pastoral: Affirm the truth, and declare the gospel that is always in harmony with that truth. The content is biblical: Illicit desires and illicit actions are both sin. Thus, the experience of same-sex attraction is not morally neutral but sinful. Nevertheless there is good news for believers that must be celebrated. Despite the continuing presence of sinful desires, believers are forgiven in Christ and able to please God in the Spirit! Surely, there are weary souls that might be granted rest and refreshment through a word like this.

The report, and especially the Twelve Statements, can be a valuable resource for pastors, elders, and Reformed/Presbyterian believers. The value is in the careful, clear, well researched statements and the pastoral applications of the truth of God's Word. Pastors and elders who face the daunting task of bringing biblical counsel to those struggling with same-sex attraction or related issues of human sexuality would do well to read and make use of this report in their work. Likewise, all believers would profit from reading the careful and clear explanations of these difficult issues, regardless of whether or not they or their loved ones face the issues personally.

We who confess man's total depravity should not be surprised when the biblical doctrine of human sexuality comes under attack from without, nor when the corruption of human sexuality manifests itself in our hearts and the hearts for children. So let us not be caught off guard, but prepare ourselves to minister to our neighbors and defend the truth of God's Word. The clear articulation and application of the truth in this report can serve God's people well in that regard.

6 Report, p. 54.

7 Report, p. 5.

8 Report, p. 8.



Search the Scriptures

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Jonah's commission

II Kings 14:23-27, though it gives us the only other information we have of Jonah, does not mention his commission to Nineveh. We do not know, therefore, when in his prophetic career Jonah was told to go and preach in Nineveh, but his reluctance would seem to indicate that it was later rather than sooner, that is, after he had preached in Israel with little fruit.

Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh must be explained in part by the apostasy of the northern kingdom. Afraid that God would be merciful to Nineveh, he must have wondered why God did not do in Israel what He did do in Nineveh. Having preached in Israel, Jonah was well aware of Israel's lack of response to the Word of God. His attempts to avoid God's commission are not the response of a young man new to his calling, but of an older man frustrated in bringing God's Word to people who would not listen.

Only the book of Jonah records God's word of commission, the word that Jonah deliberately disobeyed: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." Never before had God sent any of His prophets to preach outside Israel, but God's word to Jonah could not be mistaken. It was Jonah's obligation to go where God sent him, just as the church must go preaching God's Word in the New Testament. God would make sure, too, that Jonah fulfilled his commission.

Jonah's commission is the first illustration in the book of God's sovereignty in salvation, the theme of the book. The gospel is the means of salvation and in His sovereignty God has the right to send preachers and the gospel they preach where He wills and by whom He wills. Though in the Old Testament "salvation was of the Jews" (John 4:22), God sent Jonah outside Jewry to the heathen. He had never before commanded of anyone what He commanded Jonah, but God's will and purpose and call were supreme.

As though to underline the difficulty of Jonah's calling and His own sovereignty in sending Jonah, God mentions both the greatness of the city and its wickedness. Surely when Jonah thought of the greatness of Nineveh, he thought not only of Nineveh's vast extent

(it was so large that it was three days' journey to cross it). Jonah would also have remembered that Nineveh was great at Israel's expense. Though Israel was at the height of its power, Nineveh was already rising and threatening Israel's dominance. He would have thought of Nineveh's unparalleled reputation for cruelty and wickedness, that too at Israel's expense. The book of Nahum is a commentary on Nineveh's wickedness at a later date. It was a city great in size, in ferocity and in wickedness, and all to the detriment of Jonah's own nation and people.

There were few cities as renowned for evil, even in those days, as Nineveh. The city had been established by Nimrod in his great rebellion against God (Gen. 10:8-12) and had continued to live up to that evil beginning. Worse, for Jonah, its wickedness and idolatry and cruelty were often imitated in Israel. He was, in Israel, preaching to people who worshiped Nineveh's gods in the foolish belief that those gods were responsible for Nineveh's greatness—that by worshiping them those gods would do for Israel what they had supposedly done for Nineveh. The people of Israel in those days were no different from the Jews to whom Jesus compared the Ninevites. If anything, they were worse, for these Ninevites repented and Israel did not (Matt. 12:41).

God told Jonah to go preach there because the city's wickedness had come up before Him. What a reminder that is of God's sovereignty in causing the gospel to be preached! It is not a universal love of God or a universal cross that are the reason for preaching the gospel, but the lostness of those to whom the gospel is preached. The gospel is the only hope of salvation for lost sinners, Israelites or Ninevites. God, in sending Jonah to Nineveh, was reminding Israel of its obligation to hear the preaching of the prophets and repent. Not Jeroboam's military might, but the still, small voice of the gospel was Israel's only hope of salvation. That reminder is for us also, who are often slow of heart to hear, believe, and obey the gospel when it is preached.

The wickedness of Nineveh is also a reminder that the wickedness of others and of our society is a reason to witness to others and to preach the gospel wherever

er God gives opportunity. Gross immorality, abortion, homosexuality, gender confusion, an end of marriage as an institution, broken homes, rebellion, violence, blasphemy and lies are not reasons for us to keep our heads down in hope that we will not be noticed. They are the reason why others need the gospel and need our witness. Those who promote such evil are militant and threatening, as was Nineveh, but we may not be silent.

God shows His sovereignty, too, in sending Jonah to Nineveh and not to any other heathen city, and in making Nineveh the only exception to the great privileges that belonged exclusively to Israel in the Old Testament. His eternal purpose is truly unconditional and that is evident in this Old Testament setting. Israel was at the heart of God's purpose in the Old Testament, but not because they were more deserving than others or ever would be. God, who does all things according to the counsel of His own will, was free in His eternal purpose and in the working out of that purpose to save Nineveh.

That is another lesson for us who are so often inclined to think that we have some advantage over others—be it birth, nationality, skin color, knowledge, piety, faithfulness, covenant privileges, or whatever. Never can we distinguish ourselves from others in relation to God. Never are the differences between us and others the reason for God's goodness to us. Never may we think that God chose us because we are different from others.

Nineveh's wickedness was the expressed reason for Jonah's call there. But there are other reasons that come out in the story, some of which we have mentioned.

Jonah was sent to Nineveh, first, because God had His elect people there. Only one generation was numbered among those chosen ones, but having been chosen by God and eternally loved by Him, it was necessary that they, like all of us, be saved from the sin and unbelief into which the whole human race had fallen. In showing those Ninevites (some of them at least) to be among His elect, God shows that His purpose in election is sovereign and unconditional. He shows, too, that election is effectual, using the most unusual circumstances and the shortest and poorest of sermons to save those elect Ninevites.

God shows that the gospel is the means by which He saves His elect, and that the gospel is and must be preached by those who are sent (Rom. 10). He does not save the Ninevites by some direct revelation but by the gospel, which was and is and ever shall be the power of God unto salvation. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How

beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:14, 15).

He shows in the preaching of Jonah that the power of preaching is not in the personality or ability of the preacher but is His own divine power. Never was a sermon preached so ineffectively and poorly as Jonah preached in Nineveh. Seven words in English and, then, only by way of obeying God's bare command. Never was a sermon preached with so little compassion on the part of the preacher for his audience. Jonah thought more of his vine than of the Ninevites. Never did a sermon have so little of the cross in it, at least expressly, but God used Jonah's preaching to save a city and a generation.

So too, God was looking ahead to the salvation and gathering of the Gentiles in the New Testament, to a time of wider mercy that would exalt the cross and saving work of His Son. He was showing what would happen from the time of Christ's coming in the flesh until the end.

This was a warning to Israel that when the Word of God falls on deaf ears, He takes His Word away and gives it to others. In the New Testament He would do that in the evangelizing and salvation of the Gentile nations. That warning is for us also, who may never think that we have some special right to a place in God's kingdom, to His Word, and to the privileges of the gospel. We, too, can be cut out through unbelief.

But in sending Jonah to Nineveh, God also sends him on Israel's behalf, though Jonah did not realize that. God was doing what Romans 11:11 describes, sending the gospel to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy: "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." He continues to do this in the New Testament, provoking Israel to jealousy and thus bringing the remnant to faith and repentance.

In sending Jonah to Nineveh, God was not turning His back on Israel. He was showing His mercy and faithfulness to His people. This is the real point of II Kings 14:24-27. There was no mercy simply in giving them a king like Jeroboam II, great king that he was. Jeroboam would become the nemesis of the nation by his failure to depart from the sins of his namesake. God in mercy was using Jeroboam to preserve the nation for the sake of the remnant, whom He would provoke by the salvation of Nineveh and to whom He would bring salvation.

That God does not destroy us when we sin and are disobedient is not a reason for complacency and contin-

ued indifference, especially when He warns us, as He did Israel, by sending the gospel to those who are in our eyes no people at all. It is a reason to sit up and take notice, to practice self-examination and humility, and to repent.

Did God's sending of Jonah to Nineveh provoke Israel to jealousy? There is no record of it in Scripture, unless the coming of the remnant to Hezekiah's Passover is proof that God's purpose with Israel was accomplished. In any case, we may be sure that the remnant, only seven thousand in the days of Ahab and Elijah, was provoked to shame and repentance, to faith in God's saving mercy, and to hope in the promises, though the majority were hardened.

Thus the book of Jonah and the story of Jonah, part of the Hebrew Scriptures, became God's Word to His people, a word of mercy and faithfulness, illustrated not

only in the salvation of Nineveh but in God's dealing with His wayward prophet. It became, in the story of Jonah's time in the belly of the fish, another promise of Christ. And we may be sure that the remnant did not laugh, as many must have and still do, when they heard Jonah's story, but humbled themselves as Jonah did and as did Nineveh.

The book remains God's Word to us, reminding us of our obligations under the gospel, of the sovereignty of God in salvation, and of God's mercy in Christ to wayward, wandering sinners: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6). Jonah is not just an unusual story, but the gospel of grace recorded for all time on the pages of God's Word.



Believing and confessing

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Of free will, and thus of human powers

(Second Helvetic Confession, 9c)

The regenerate work not only passively but actively. [I]n this connection we teach that there are two things to be observed: First, that the regenerate, in choosing and doing good, work not only passively but actively. For they are moved by God that they may do themselves what they do. For Augustine rightly adduces the saying that "God is said to be our helper. But no one can be helped unless he does something." The Manichaeans robbed man of all activity and made him like a stone or a block of wood. [The next paragraph will include the second observation.]

The regenerate work actively

In this paragraph, the SHC makes explicit what is clearly implied in what it has already taught concerning free will. The confession has rejected the teaching of free will. This is the teaching that the fallen sinner retains some good after the Fall. At the very least, he retains the ability to will and choose that which is pleasing to God. This was the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in the days of the Reformation. It

is still the teaching of Roman Catholicism. Sadly, this false teaching is widespread in what is today considered to be evangelical Christianity. What must never be forgotten is that behind Rome's teaching of meritorious good works is the teaching that man has in himself the ability to do that which is good, at the very least to choose the good. That is the teaching of free will. That teaching of Rome was repudiated by the Reformers.

Over against the God-dishonoring heresy of free will, the Reformers taught that God works in us both to will and to do the good. This is the teaching defended by the SHC in this paragraph. This teaching is also reflected in the experience of the child of God. Every child of God knows that any willing and doing of that which is good does not originate in himself but is due to the work of God's grace in him.

The result of this work of God's grace—the infallible fruit of grace—is that the Christian does actively will and do that which is good. The fruit of grace is that the regenerate "are moved by God that they may *do themselves what they do.*" God does not will and

do *for* them but *in* them. As the result of the work of the Holy Spirit “the regenerate, in choosing and doing good, work not only passively but actively.” That they *actively* will and do the good is the consequence of God’s work of grace within them.

In this paragraph, the SHC makes plain that good works are not to be viewed only ever as fruit and nothing but fruit—fruit that in a sort of automatic and mysterious way simply appears in the life of the regenerate. It is certainly true that good works are fruit. In many places the Scriptures teach that our willing and doing that which pleases God is the fruit of His work of grace in us. The very first psalm describes the Christian as “a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season.” “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,” Solomon says in Proverbs 11:30. In Romans 7:4 the apostle Paul teaches that Christians are married to the risen Christ “that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” In more than one place, Holy Scripture speaks of the holy life of the sanctified believer as the “fruit of the Spirit,” as for example in Galatians 5:22 and Ephesians 5:9.

That good works are fruit underscores the grace of God that is the source of the holy life of the believer. A dead tree does not produce fruit. Only a living tree, cared for and carefully pruned by the husbandman produces fruit. The Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Article 11 teaches that by the work of regeneration the Holy Spirit “infuses new qualities into the will,” with the result that “He renders it good, obedient, and pliable.” And further, that He “actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.”

But fruit is not the only way in which Scripture speaks of good works. Good works are not only fruit, certainly not fruit that in some automatic and mysterious way appears in the life of the believer like apples or pears on a fruit tree. To speak of good works only as fruit overlooks the important teaching of Scripture that the child of God *consciously* wills and does that which pleases God. Apple trees and pear trees do not consciously produce apples and pears. The biblical description that captures this aspect of good works is Scripture’s teaching that good works are a *sacrifice*—a sacrifice of thankfulness. Just as the Old Testament Israelite brought his sacrifice to the temple and offered it up to God, so does the Christian offer up to God that which he wills and does in obedience to God’s law.

The comparison of good works to sacrifices is found throughout the Bible. It is a frequent description of good works in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 4:5 the psalmist exhorts God’s people, “Offer the sacrifices of

righteousness.” And in Psalm 116:17, he pledges, “I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” The apostle exhorts New Testament believers to “present [their] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Believers are admonished in Hebrews 13:15, 16: “By him, therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” In this passage, the two biblical descriptions of good works are brought together. We are called to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,” which is “the fruit of our lips.” Good works are the Christian’s willing sacrifice of thankfulness to God.

Appeal to Augustine

That Christians are “moved by God that they may do themselves what they do,” is the point of the SHC’s reference to the early church father Augustine: “For Augustine rightly adduces the saying that ‘God is said to be our helper. But no one can be helped unless he does something.’” The reference to Augustine in this and again in the next paragraph, indicate that the Reformers were well-versed in the early church fathers. They taught nothing new, but rather what had been taught in the New Testament church from the beginning. Additionally, the frequent appeal to Augustine points out that in so many ways the Reformation was a recovery of the teaching of Augustine. The foundation of the Reformation was laid in the clear teaching of sacred Scripture, particularly the writings of the apostle Paul. But the first tier of bricks laid on that foundation were bricks fired in the writings of Augustine. Time and again the Reformers appealed to the bishop from North Africa. The Reformation was, in large measure, only a recovery of the theology of Augustine, which had been abandoned by the Roman Catholic Church.

In this instance, Bullinger appeals to Augustine in order to support the teaching of the SHC that the regenerate work actively. This he concludes as an implication of the frequent notice in Scripture that God is the helper of His people. This teaching of Scripture, Augustine argues, implies that the regenerate work actively, for “no one can be helped unless he does something.”

Frequently, the Psalms refer to God as our helper in the battle against the enemies that beset the child of God. In Psalm 20:1, 2 we read, “The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion.” And in Psalm 33:20 we

read, “Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.” God is not the “help” of those who are inactive and passive, napping in their Lazy-Boy recliner. But He is the help of those who are engaged in the battle of faith against our three mortal enemies: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

Some of the psalms likely refer to David’s victory over Goliath. That is a good example of how God is the Helper of His people. God did not merely assist David, so that David did his part and God did His part. Neither did God nor an angel fight against Goliath while David sat passively (inactive) on the sidelines watching God’s defeat of the Philistine giant. Rather, God helped David by working *in* him and *through* him. David selected five stones from the brook (I Sam. 17:40). David proclaimed to the giant, “I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (I Sam. 17:45). David took careful aim and slung the stone that struck the Philistine hero. David cut off his head. It was God who “helped” David, that is, used David and equipped David to defeat Goliath, so that I Samuel 17:50 can say, “So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him.”

A senseless stock and block

Over against the proper biblical teaching concerning the Holy Spirit’s work in regeneration is the false teaching that reduces man to “a stone or a block of wood.” The SHC attributes this wrong teaching to the Manichaeans. Manichaeism was a teaching that arose in the early history of the New Testament church. It was a dualistic teaching, maintaining that good and evil have always existed, that they are both eternal, competing principles. Evil did not enter God’s good creation but was always present in the world. In addition, Manichaeism was deterministic. The good and evil that human beings do, they do under the compulsion of that which has been predetermined. In the true sense of the word, it is a teaching that “robbed man of all activity and made him like a stone or a block of wood.”

The Canons of Dordt make reference to the same error in Canons III/IV, Article 16: “[S]o also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto.” This was the caricature of the Reformed view promoted by the Arminians on account of the Reformed denial of free will and insistence on the total depravity of the sinner. The Reformed did not grant the error that the

Arminians maliciously attributed to them. They did not say, “If we must choose between free will and the teaching that man is a stock and block, we choose the teaching that man is a stock and block.” They did no such thing! Rather, they vehemently denied the Arminian calumny and maintained the biblical truth concerning regeneration. “[T]he will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God” but also “in consequence of this influence becomes itself active.” And therefore “man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received.”

Although the Reformed faith is often caricatured as reducing man to a stock or a block, this is in fact the teaching of antinomianism. The antinomian would not very often admit that this is his teaching. But this, nevertheless, is the result of the teaching of antinomianism. Antinomianism, among other things, rejects the biblical and confessional truth of regeneration. Fearful that any willing and doing on the part of man, even regenerated man, poses a threat to the gracious character of salvation, antinomianism effectively reduces man to a stock and block. God does not work in those who are regenerated to cause them to will and work. Instead, man is reduced to a stock and a block who is only acted upon—we might say a robot or automaton. Reluctantly, perhaps, the antinomian might say that regenerated man may be said to will and do. But he works only passively and not actively. And thus, it is supposed, the grace of God is safeguarded, and God receives all the glory for man’s willing and doing.

This paragraph of the SHC is a trumpet blast against the false teaching of antinomianism. Antinomianism does not preserve the grace and glory of God; it perverts God’s grace and robs Him of His glory. It denies the sovereignty of God’s grace that makes His people “willing in the day of His power,” to use the language of Psalm 110:3. The Reformed faith repudiates antinomianism in all its forms. In this case, it is the biblical teaching concerning regeneration that exposes this dreadful error.

The SHC is a clear reminder that the Reformed faith is the straight and narrow way into the kingdom, on either side of which there is a deep ditch. On one side, there is the deep ditch of legalism, works righteousness, and free will. But there is another ditch, equally as dangerous and as much a threat. That ditch is the ditch of antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism. Recognizing both ditches, may God preserve the Protestant Reformed Churches from falling into either ditch, keeping us on the right way that safely navigates between them both.



I believe

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

The instrumental cause of our salvation

However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an *instrument* with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an *instrument* that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

—Belgic Confession, Article 22

Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone *instrument* of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

—Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 11.2

In the theology of salvation, the instrumental cause refers to the tool God uses to grant His elect and regenerated people their salvation. Faith alone is this instrumental cause.

To understand this further, we need to go back 300 years before Christ was born, when the ancient philosopher Aristotle attempted to describe how a change occurs in time. (I know I am losing some of us already, but hang on, it's not too hard to grasp!). Aristotle said there are four types of causes to any event. He used the illustration of a sculptor making a sculpture to explain the notion. First, Aristotle said, there is the *efficient* cause of the sculpture. The efficient cause is the man who will carry out the project. Second, there is the *formal* cause. This is the idea for the sculpture that the person has in his head, the form that he intends the block of granite to take. Third, he said, there is the *material* cause. This is the block of granite, the actual material that will be the substance of the sculpture. Fourth, there is the *final* cause. This is the purpose for which the whole project was conceived: to adorn a landscape, to create something beautiful, to express the talent of the artist, etc. These are obviously not all causes in the same sense, but the word “cause” was applied to all four aspects because without any one of them the sculpture would not exist.

There was something missing in Aristotle's explanation, however—the *tool* the sculptor used by which the granite was made into a sculpture. This later became known as the *instrumental* cause. That is, the *instrument* or tool that the efficient cause used to turn the material into the form he wanted for the final purpose he intended for it.¹

The Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries despised the stranglehold Aristotle and Greek philosophy in general had upon theology during the Medieval period. Luther in particular is famous for his invective against Aristotle. However, both Luther and Calvin made a modified use of these “causes” in their teaching concerning salvation. They did so because of God's revelation, not Aristotle's philosophy. But the language and concepts, with some adjustment, worked to explain clearly what Scripture revealed about our salvation.

But if we attend to the four kinds of causes which philosophers bring under our view in regard to effects.... The *efficient* cause of our eternal salvation the Scripture uniformly proclaims to be the mercy and free love of the heavenly Father towards us; the *material* cause to be Christ, with the obedience by which he purchased righteousness for us; and what can the...*instrumental* cause be but faith? ...Faith is thus the *instrumental* cause by which righteousness is applied to us. He lastly subjoins the *final* cause when he says, ‘To declare at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.’²

According to Calvin, the *efficient* cause of our salvation is the Triune God and His grace. He alone is the author and executor of our salvation. The *material* cause is Christ and His righteousness alone. His righteousness is the ‘material’ granted to us as the substance of our salvation. The sole *instrumental* cause of salvation for the regenerated, Calvin said, is faith. Faith alone is the tool by which God grants to us in our con-

1 Technically, the instrumental cause became a sub-cause of the efficient cause.

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.14.17. Emphasis added.

scious life the salvation stored up in Christ. The *final* cause or purpose for granting us this salvation is that God might manifest His righteousness as the God who is just and justifies His people. That is, the final cause is the revelation of God's glory.

One way to think of these causes is to view them as various layers of the answer to the question, "Why are we saved?" There are four answers to this one question.

1. God determined to save us by His grace.
2. Christ and His righteousness.
3. Faith in Christ, not our own works.
4. That God might be glorified.

Each has its own place if understood correctly. And each must stay in its own place to be understood correctly.

Calvin and the other Reformers believed that to speak of our salvation in terms of these causes was *biblical*. Calvin explains that all these "causes" of our salvation can be found in Romans 3:23-26. The verses read:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Calvin lays it out this way:

"Being justified freely by *his grace*"—This is the efficient cause, God and His grace.

"*Through the redemption* that is in Christ Jesus"—This is the material cause, the righteousness of Christ.

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation *through faith*"—This is the instrumental cause, faith.

"To *declare* at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier...."—This is the final cause, God's own glory.³

Calvin and the Reformers found this way of speaking of our salvation also helpful to ward off any compromise with salvation by works. "But if we attend to the four kinds of causes which philosophers bring under our view in regard to effects, we shall find that not one of them is applicable to works as a cause of salvation."⁴ Scripturally, good works cannot be made to fit into any of these categories, the instrumental cause included. When the Scriptures speak of being justified *by* or *through* or *out of* faith and not works, the Reformers saw the Scriptures referring to faith as the sole instrumental cause of our salvation, the only pipeline

through which every drop of our salvation comes to us from Christ. This is why the Reformed creeds use the term "instrument" to describe faith's function of receiving salvation out of Christ. It is helpful and clarifying to have these four causes in mind when one reads that word "instrument" in the context of God's work of saving us. Distinguishing these causes helps us to understand and maintain the unique role of faith.

Faith is the lone tool by which God works into us what Christ has done for us, so that we are conscious of salvation. Faith is the lone instrument by which God imputes and imparts Christ and all His benefits to us so that we know in ourselves and for ourselves the saving work of Christ. Active faith sees in Christ all hope for salvation's blessings. It relies upon this Christ. As such, faith does not become part of the *material cause* of our salvation. It is not a part of the righteousness. Faith contributes nothing. Rather, it acts as a receiving pipeline through which all the rest of our salvation comes. Faith is itself part of the salvation Christ earned for us. When given to us, faith in us becomes a conscious receiver of the remainder of Christ's benefits.

Sanctification too is received through this sole instrumental cause. It is not the case that, moving from justification to sanctification, now good works become part of the pipeline, the instrumental cause of our salvation. Article 24 of the Belgic Confession begins this way, "We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God, and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin." The regeneration spoken of here is in the broad sense, referring to all the work of sanctification (that's why the next phrase is "and make him a new man"). Notice, "this faith," regenerates and makes the child of God a new man. This is a reference to the faith spoken of in the previous articles. In other words, the same faith that is the sole instrumental cause of justification according to Articles 22-23 is the sole instrumental cause of sanctification according to Article 24. Notice also the phrase, "causing him to live new life." The *effect* of this regenerating faith is a new life of good works. The works are not the instrumental cause, they are the result of faith's receiving sanctification out of Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith is explicit. "But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, *sanctification*, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."⁵

Calvin (and other Reformers) used the word "means"

³ *Institutes*, 3.14.17.

⁴ *Institutes*, 3.14.17. He also wards off Osiander's errant view of justification with this language in 3.11.7.

⁵ Chapter 14.2. Emphasis added. See in Scripture Acts 26:18; Acts 15:9.

(among other terms) to describe God's use of our good works (as I hope to explain in another article). But the Reformers were careful to say what they meant by good works as a means and what they did not mean by it. "Means" never meant "instrumental cause." From one perspective, many things are means God uses in our salvation. The minister studying and preaching the Word faithfully; the hard pew that keeps me awake to listen. Oxygen is, in a sense, a means in our salvation. There must be oxygen for me to be alive to know God. From one perspective, *all things* can be called means God uses in my salvation.⁶ But only one thing is an *instrumental*

cause in my salvation, drawing out of Christ His benefits, including their experience: faith. And when faith is functioning this way, it is absent of any of its works. It is solely a believer, a truster, an embracer, a receiver of what is in Christ.

Next time I will explain why it is dangerous to be ambiguous about this in the context of Rome's teaching and that of the Federal Vision. In articles following, I hope to explain how especially Calvin spoke of the necessity of good works in this context.

⁶ Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "...yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation."



Ministering to the saints

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

The elders' work of oversight (2) Overseeing the preaching and administration of the sacraments

Elders in Christ's church have biblical and confessional warrant to oversee the congregation's worship. Such oversight involves ensuring that the worship services are properly conducted and correcting anything that is improper. The church *needs* her elders to oversee her worship. These points were made in the previous article in this series (February 15, 2020).

Because this oversight extends to the congregation's worship, it extends particularly to the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Our Church Order in Articles 15, 23, and 56-70 indicates that the oversight of the elders includes these aspects of the congregation's worship.

Overseeing the preaching: In what respects?

Overseeing the preaching requires the elders to evaluate the preaching in several respects. First, the elders must determine that the preaching is orthodox, in accord with Scripture and the Reformed confessions. If false doctrine is preached, the elders must address that in a biblical and church orderly way.

Second, the elders must see to it that what is preached is the *pure gospel*, and that the pure gospel is preached

faithfully. The consistory must judge that the minister preaches this pure gospel faithfully, not just *most* of the time, but *always*, from week to week. The whole counsel of God must be proclaimed and no essential point of the gospel overlooked.

Third, the elders must ensure that the preaching meets the needs of the congregation. Faithful preaching of the pure gospel will always meet the basic and general needs of the congregation, the need to be comforted regarding our sins and built up in faith and godliness. However, the preaching must specifically address the needs of a particular congregation at a particular time. It must also be antithetical, for the people need to be warned against error and to be shown that the lie presents itself in many forms.

Fourth, the elders must ensure that the gospel is preached in a manner that is conducive to edification. Is it lively? Does it give evidence that the minister himself has sat under the Word of God in the text and been moved by that Word? Do its tone and spirit, and even its words, convey the pastor's love for the congregation and desire to glorify God?

In these four areas the elders must evaluate *all* the

preaching, both on the Lord's Day and at the special worship services, and both the preaching of scriptural texts as well as of the Heidelberg Catechism. The elders must ensure that the Catechism is faithfully and correctly preached, and that these sermons are fresh and lively. The consistory should not turn a blind eye if most of the congregation views the Catechism sermons as something to be endured but finds the sermons that expound passages of Scripture to be more fresh and edifying.

Overseeing the preaching: How?

Consciously and deliberately, the elders must evaluate the preaching in these respects. The elder must not ask the question *for the first time* as he drives to a consistory meeting: "Let me think—has there been anything wrong with the preaching lately? I think it has all gone well." Rather, he must ask these questions as the sermon is preached and have his answer to them by the time the sermon is finished.

Furthermore, the elders must *actively* express their evaluation of the preaching. They are to bear record that the preaching is sound and wholesome. Telling the elders of Ephesus that he had declared to them the whole counsel of God, the apostle Paul said, "I take you to record this day," that is, he required them to bear witness to the fact and assent to it (Acts 20:26-27). Such is the calling of the church's elders today.

The elders convey this to the congregation not only by the custom of shaking the minister's hand after the service but also by defending the minister's preaching against undue criticism, and by speaking highly of the preaching to others.

They must also convey this judgment to the pastor himself. If the minister preaches false doctrine, the elders must point that out to him. They must then also determine whether the statement of false doctrine was an inadvertent, careless statement that did not really express the minister's conviction, or whether that statement expressed his own conviction. If they judge that he was careless, they must admonish him, require him to do whatever is necessary to retract his error, and see that he has learned from his mistake. If they determine that his false doctrine does indeed express the conviction of his own mind and heart, they must suspend him from office and put him under discipline, proceeding according to Church Order, Articles 75-77 and 79-80.

When the minister's preaching is faithful and edifying, the elders must convey this to him as a body. That a portion of every consistory meeting (or, more practically, when all is going well, every third or fourth consistory meeting) be devoted to sermon evaluation is a good practice. On such occasions the consistory can

encourage the pastor not to be weary in well-doing. At the same time, this gives opportunity to suggest that he preach a sermon or series that addresses a particular topic or warns against a specific threat. They may encourage him to get to know the congregation and its needs better, and to reflect that in his preaching. They may encourage him, if necessary, to spend more time in sermon preparation.

Carrying out this oversight of the preaching requires the elders to know the congregation well, so that they know its needs and can direct the preacher regarding aspects of his preaching. This also requires them to know and love their pastor well. He must trust them and trust their leadership of him. At the same time, he must know by experience that they love the gospel, love the congregation, and love him.

Overseeing the preaching: Why?

Why must the elders do all this? Why may they not assume that the pastor will do his work well and turn their attention to other matters? The answer, in short, is this: their pastor is only a mere human, and nothing more than a mere human.

As a human, he has weaknesses that could be manifest in his preaching. As a human, he has his particular interests (not wrong in itself), and might succumb to the temptation to focus only on those portions of Scripture that are of more interest to him. As a human, he has temptations. Perhaps his own besetting sin, or perhaps his frustration toward a particular member of his congregation, affects his preaching. As a human, he has limitations. Perhaps he pastors a large congregation, or perhaps he deals with a chronic illness or trial of his own. The elders must bear him up, help him, guide him, advise him, and assist him, so that he does not wear away (Ex. 18:18).

Overseeing the administration of the sacraments

To ensure that the members of the congregation partake rightly of the sacraments and faithfully use them is also part of the calling of the elders. However, their calling toward the congregation is not the emphasis of this article; this article emphasizes the calling of the elders to provide for the right *administration* of the sacraments.

That this is their calling the Church Order indicates. Baptism must be administered "in the public assembly when the Word of God is preached" (Art. 56), and the Lord's Supper is to be administered "only where there is supervision of elders" (Art. 64). These articles not only say where and when the sacraments must be adminis-

tered but also indicate that the elders are to take the oversight of their administration.

Providing for the right administration of the sacraments means that the elders must ensure that the signs (or elements) of the sacraments are present—water for baptism, and bread and wine for the Lord’s Supper. The elders must set the date for the administration of baptism and of the Lord’s Supper, and inform the congregation of these upcoming events. The elders must ensure that new parents bring their children for baptism, and that the members of the congregation actually do partake of the Lord’s Supper.

None should think that this is the duty of the minister alone. Article 57 of the Church Order might leave the impression that it is: “The ministers shall do their utmost to the end that the father present his child for baptism.” In reality, this article emphasizes the calling of the ministers to instruct the congregation that a godly father himself, and godly parents themselves, must present their children for baptism rather than having a sponsor or god-parent do so. The article does not suggest that the minister is responsible for the oversight of the administration of the sacrament.

The ministers administer the sacrament but the elders oversee its administration. They are to ensure that these sacraments are administered in a public worship service, at which the gospel is proclaimed in the sermon (Church Order, Arts. 56, 62). They must see to it that the minister sprinkles nothing but water, and actually does sprinkle that water, on the one being baptized, and that he actually breaks the bread and pours the wine in the presence of the congregation. This is implied in the requirement of Article 62 of the Church Order “that the outward ceremonies as prescribed in God’s Word be not changed.”

The elders must also ensure that the minister uses the liturgical forms that the Reformed Churches have adopted for the sacraments (Church Order, Arts. 58 and 62), and preaches a preparatory sermon before and

an applicatory sermon after the administration of the Lord’s Supper (the questions for church visitation require this). They must ensure that the sermons preached on the occasions of baptism and the Lord’s Supper set forth the gospel, and show how the sacrament signifies and seals that gospel. The purpose of the previous statement is not to suggest that the sermon must explain the

doctrine of baptism or the Lord’s Supper, but that the sermon must declare the *reality* that is signified and sealed in the sacraments.

Ultimately, the elders must ask these questions: Are the sacraments being profaned in this congrega-

tion? Are any individuals profaning them by their partaking, but also, is the minister profaning them by his administration of them? To put it positively, is God pleased and glorified? Does the congregation treat God’s holy sacraments with due reverence and awe?

Reformed believers desire their elders to take this calling seriously. By taking this calling seriously, elders help guard the church against laziness, negligence, apathy, and any other threat to faithfulness.

The elders of those churches that are part of a denomination also receive encouragement from the other churches to carry out their work faithfully. At church visitation, the consistories are asked whether the Word is administered twice a Sunday, the Heidelberg Catechism regularly explained, and the Lord’s Supper celebrated at least four times a year. These are not merely queries whether the minister is doing his work well. Rather, they investigate whether the consistory is overseeing his work properly. If the answer to any or all of these questions should be negative, the next two questions must be these: Why is the minister not doing so? And what is the consistory doing about it?

Elders, we thank you for your diligent oversight of the preaching and sacraments. We pray you continue to take that oversight seriously, and that through your labors we might continue to manifest the marks of the true church.

Reformed believers desire their elders to take this calling seriously. By taking this calling seriously, elders help guard the church against laziness, negligence, apathy, and any other threat to faithfulness.

News Report of Classis West of the PRCA

Meeting September 23, 2020

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on September 23, 2020, in Edgerton PRC (Edgerton,

MN). The meeting was capably chaired by Rev. Matt DeBoer (pastor of Edgerton PRC), who was serving in this capacity for the first time in his ministry.

Noticeably absent from the meeting were elder delegates from Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, AB) and First PRC (Edmonton, AB). These consistories were not able to attend the meeting due to the restrictions of the Canadian government with respect to COVID-19.

Routine reports from the stated clerk, the classical committee, and the reading sermon library committee were read and approved. A report from a special committee to assist a consistory was also received, their work approved, and the committee discontinued.

In closed session, a consistory sought the advice of Classis to increase the censure of two confessing members. Another consistory sought the advice of Classis to proceed with the erasure of a baptized member. After hearing of the impenitence of these individuals and the careful labors of these consistories, Classis took decisions to advise the consistories to proceed to further steps of Christian discipline.

Classis treated an appeal from an individual that objected to a statement in a sermon by his minister. Classis declared the appeal not legally before it on the grounds that the matter was not finished at the consistory level, that the individual had not researched and interacted with the decisions of recent PRCA synods that may touch on the matter, and that the individual gave

evidence of not understanding the necessary function of the Three Forms of Unity in the process of protest and appeal.

In closed session, Classis treated an appeal regarding the work of a consistory. Classis ruled the appeal not legally before it because the requirements of Articles 30 and 31 of the Church Order had not been met.

Worth noting is that the Classis did not need to adopt a pulpit supply schedule, since at this time there are no vacancies in the Classis.

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$5,897.52.

The next meeting of Classis is scheduled for March 3, 2021, in Hope (Redlands) PRC. The consistory of Hope (Redlands) PRC did inform Classis that they are located in a state with some of the tightest restrictions on gatherings due to COVID-19, and asked Classis either to appoint a different host church or to appoint an alternate host church in case they believe it is not possible for them to host. Classis appointed Peace PRC as an alternate host, and authorized the Classical Committee to make the necessary arrangements in consultation with the consistory of Hope (Redlands) PRC. All this, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma
Stated Clerk, Classis West



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

When the Crete, IL PRC organized in 1926 how many families were there, and in which city? See the church profile section for this answer. More trivia next time!

Sister-church activities

It was decided that Prof. R. Dykstra would bring God's word to Covenant ERC of Singapore for four Sundays in October in the morning worship services via live-streaming. "We are thankful to the audio team who are able to support the church with the use of modern technology, and Prof. Dykstra who is willing, and Marcus Wee who is assisting him from the Seminary's lecture room" (CERC bulletin).

And from the Philippines:

The government put Metro Manila and nearby provinces under the General Community Quarantine

(GCQ) up to October 31, 2020. The Government of Valenzuela City is implementing the #ValTrace QR Code system effective on October 5, 2020. All residents are required to register online in order to get their Valtracer QR code which is linked to the CESU database for efficient contact tracing. All business establishment are mandated to implement the #NoQRCode NoEntry policy."

When I saw this note on a bulletin of Maranatha PRC in the Philippines, I asked missionary-pastor Rev. Daniel Kleyen to explain it for us. Here is his reply:

The first part is probably clear—simply a continuation of the same quarantine level that was already in place in Metro Manila. The second part refers to the fact that the City of Valenzuela (where Maranatha PRC is located) is implementing and requiring use of an electronic contact-tracing system, using QR codes. Most places are already doing QR codes, also here in Antipolo. Thus when we go into any business or mall,

we have to scan, with our smart phones, a QR code that the business has, and that takes you to a website on your phone where you enter your information. Usually they ask for your name, contact number, where you live, your body temp (which they take when you enter the store or mall), etc. But it sounds like Valenzuela is going a step further and requiring that you register online ahead of time so that your information is already in the system. Seems they will then give you your own unique QR code and the business or mall simply scans your code when you enter and in that way gets all your info and can trace who's been there, when they were, etc. The idea, of course, is that if a COVID-19 outbreak occurs in that mall or business, or if they find out that someone was there the same time as you were who had COVID, then they can let you know that you've most likely been exposed. Not sure that's so simple an explanation, but hope it helps.

“But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3).

Minister activities

Prof. Herman Hanko observed his 90th birthday on October 10. May the Lord continue to bless this saint and his wife as they continue on their pilgrimage.

Denominational activities

When Classis West met in late September in Edgerton, MN PRC, no classical appointments were made. There are no vacancies in Classis West for the first time in many years! We thank God for supplying pastors for all these congregations!

Young people's activities

The Young People's Society in Doon, IA organized their annual traditional “Survivor Run.” It took place on a

beautiful fall evening (October 12) with lots of smiles and no injuries. And their annual “Car Challenge” is in the works, scheduled for some time in early November.

The Young People's Society of Calvary PRC in Hull, IA held their annual fall pop can and softener salt fund-raiser recently.

On Thursday, November 5, the Georgetown PRC young people hosted a *take-out* soup supper. Chili, chicken noodle, cheese broccoli, and potato ham soups were available along with salad, rolls, and truffle dessert cups. Sounds delicious!

School activities

Hope Christian School of Redlands, CA is selling 2021 “Golden State Grandeur” calendars showcasing beautiful photographs of California taken by members of Hope Redlands, each inscribed with an inspirational Bible verse. The calendars are \$15 each. Order online at <https://hcsredlands.org/fundraisers/calendar> by November 14.

Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of Edgerton PRC planned the fall lecture for Friday, October 30. The lecture was to be held at Bethel CRC in Edgerton with Prof. D. Kuiper speaking on the topic “How Rightly to See Christ in Scripture.”

The Crete PRC Evangelism Committee hosted their annual Reformation Day Lecture on October 30. Prof. B. Huizinga spoke on “Of God, Through God, To God: Our Covenant Doctrine as Protestant Reformed Churches.”

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

Church profile—Crete, IL PRC

The history of Crete Protestant Reformed Church begins in the mid to late 1800s, when many Dutch fled the economic, political, and spiritual oppressions that gripped Holland. Those who fled because of religious persecution were chiefly of the Afscheiding (Secession of 1834). Many of them chose the low and high prairies south of Chicago, where they continued in their farming heritage, growing onions and melons.

Shortly after Rev. Herman Hoeksema was deposed from the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, he was asked by several concerned families in Roseland, Illinois to give a lecture. The dissatisfaction with the Christian Reformed

Church and the conviction that God's grace is sovereign and particular occasioned the organization of a small church of seven families in 1926 in the town of Lansing, Illinois.

The fledgling church saw a humble beginning; they first worshiped in a room above a hardware store. Eventually the group built a small country church in South Holland, Illinois. The congregation has grown in size, requiring two additional church buildings, a change of name, and a move farther south to Crete, IL. Today, Crete PRC has 103 families totaling 420 members and has “birthed” two daughter congregations: Peace and Cornerstone.

Holding true to the convictions of our Dutch forefathers, who made Christian education paramount, Crete PRC is one of the supporting churches for a grade school and high school of nearly 300 students.

For many years God has blessed Crete PRC with a strong Evangelism Committee that has published dozens of pamphlets, distributing them locally and around the world. But with the passing of the printed page, our committee has been transitioning to digital formats and platforms. Currently, our committee is exploring the use of podcasts and other media to continue to spread the gospel far and wide.

Our faithful Father has also given Crete PRC faithful preaching for its nearly 100 years of existence. Ten

men have been called to labor in our midst, beginning with our first pastor, Rev. P. DeBoer in 1932. God's sovereign care for us continued through the tumultuous times in the PRCA in the 1950s under Rev. Homer C. Hoeksema. Today, His word is preached to us by Rev. Nathan Langerak.

God has indeed blessed the church called by His name in Crete, IL.



Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Justin and Kim Kiel in the death of Kim's father, Mr. Dave DeVries. May they be comforted in the words of II Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

David Pryor, Clerk

Teacher needed

The Edmonton PR Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2021-2022 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1-6 minus grade 5. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com or 780-777-5780 if interested.

Notice of licensure

The faculty has licensed student Marcus Wee to speak a word of edification in the PRC. Brother Wee is a member of our sister church, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. We rejoice at this milestone in the brother's preparation for the ministry of the gospel. Any scheduling of him to lead worship services will be through the seminary faculty. This also provides us with an opportunity to impress upon our churches and sister churches the great need that we have for students for the ministry. Let us pray the Lord of the harvest to raise up laborers in His vineyard, Matthew 9:37-38.

For the faculty, Prof. Ron Cammenga, Rector