

The Standard Bearer

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Jesus' appearance to James

Rev. James Slopsema

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Jonah's fish

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Protestant Reformed Missions

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Missions threatened
(1947-1953)

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Jesus' appearance to James

After that, he was seen of James.

I Corinthians 15:8

In the first part of this chapter Paul reminds the Corinthian saints of the gospel that he had proclaimed to them. He had proclaimed not only the death of Jesus Christ but also His resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus had been verified by many witnesses: “He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (I Cor. 15:5-8).

Paul emphasized these appearances because there were those in Corinth who denied the resurrection of the body. They thought that when we die our bodies are lost to the grave forever. Paul countered that by pointing to the resurrection of Christ. His argument is that if the dead rise not, then Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, then Paul had preached falsely and their faith is vain. But now is Christ risen and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

We call special attention to the Lord's appearance to James. Jesus appeared ten different times to various individuals after His resurrection and before His ascension. The purpose of these appearances was twofold. They served to verify the *fact* of the resurrection. And they served to teach something about the *nature* of the resurrection.

This was true also of Jesus' appearance to James. Interestingly, we do not know the details of this appearance. This is the only reference to it in God's Word. Yet on the basis of Scripture, we can determine the purpose and significance of this appearance. To this we turn our attention.

Fact!

The New Testament speaks of three James.

First, there was James, the son of Zebedee and Salome, and the elder brother of John. This James appears first in the gospel accounts as a fisherman. He and his

brother John were partners with Simon Peter (Luke 5:10). Peter, James, and John were the closest of Jesus' disciples. James also became one of the twelve apostles. He suffered martyrdom at the hand of Herod in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2).

Secondly, there was James the Less. He was the son of Alphaeus (also known as Cleophas) and Mary. He was also one of the twelve disciples who later became apostles. He was called James the Less either because he was younger than James the son of Zebedee or on account of his short stature (Mark 15:40).

Finally, there was James, the brother of the Lord. Contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, Mary had other children besides Jesus. Mark 6:3 makes mention of James, Joses, Juda, Simon and “his sisters.” These were fathered by Joseph so that they were Jesus' half brothers and sisters. This James arose to a place of prominence in the early Christian church. He became the leading elder of the church at Jerusalem. He was a leading figure in the Jerusalem council that struggled with what to require of the Gentile converts (Acts 15:13). At the conclusion of his third missionary journey Paul and company reported to James and the elders that were present with him (Acts 21:18). He was inspired to write one of the New Testament books, which appears under the title of his name.

It was this James, the brother of Jesus, that is referred to by Paul. Paul gives a listing of those who saw the Lord after His resurrection in order to verify the fact of the resurrection. This is not an exhaustive list. Mention is not made of the women or of Cleopas. Perhaps they were dead by this time, as were some of the 500 to whom Jesus appeared in Galilee. Mention is made only of those who were living, were prominent in the church, and who could verify the fact of the resurrection by their recollection of Jesus' appearances to them. This points us to James, the brother of the Lord. James the brother of John was dead. James the Less had seen the Lord with the twelve, and there was no reason why the Lord should appear to him separately. This leaves James the brother of the Lord. He was not only alive at the time that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, but

he also held a place of prominence in the churches. He along with the others mentioned by Paul could verify the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

Concerning Jesus' appearance to James we have absolutely no details as to time and place. It would appear that Paul's listing is in chronological order so that Jesus' appearance to James was one of the last of Jesus' appearances. But we have no detail as to location or what was said.

Nevertheless, we can surmise from Scripture the purpose.

Purpose!

To find the purpose of Jesus' appearance to James we remember that neither James nor his siblings initially believed in Jesus. This is evident from John 7:5, "For neither did his brethren believe in him." From the context (vv. 2-4) we learn that it was the Feast of the Tabernacles. Jesus hesitated to go to Jerusalem for the feast because His enemies were lying in wait to kill Him. Evidently His siblings thought He was using His miraculous power for self-promotion. And so they sarcastically suggested that He go to Jerusalem so that His disciples could see His works. Then we have a note of explanation in verse 5: "For neither did his brethren believe in him." That is, they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah nor did they support Him in His work.

This is rather striking. James and his siblings were brought up in a covenant home. Their parents, Joseph and Mary, were outstanding covenant parents who instructed them in all the ways of the covenant. Their eldest brother, Jesus, is the Son of God come into our flesh to be the Mediator of the covenant. He set before them the supreme and perfect example of godliness. No doubt Joseph and Mary instructed their children in all the revelation they had received concerning Jesus. Yet neither James nor his siblings believed in Jesus. This is surprising. Certainly, this is not the norm in a covenant home.

The purpose of Jesus' appearance to James was evidently to convert James and his siblings. This is suggested by several things.

First, John 7:5, which speaks of the fact that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him, places us only months before Jesus' crucifixion.

Secondly, we do not find Jesus' siblings at the cross as we find Mary and others of Jesus' disciples. Even then they did not believe in Jesus.

But soon after Jesus' exaltation into heaven, we find Jesus' brothers (and sisters) with the small group of believers assembled in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13, 14).

All this indicates that Jesus appeared to His unbe-

lieving brother James exactly to convert him and bring him to faith. In this regard Jesus' appearance to James served the same purpose as His appearance later on to Saul (Paul) on the Damascus road. What Jesus said to James is unknown. But in the power of His resurrection Jesus evidently converted James, so that not only did James believe in Jesus but also His siblings were brought to believe in Him.

Significant!

This also points us to the significance of the resurrection of Jesus.

It is the power of a spiritual resurrection in our hearts.

We are by nature dead in sin so that we cannot believe in Jesus Christ. This is true even though we are born into a covenant home. This would be true even if Jesus were physically present to teach us directly, to show us miracles, and give us the supreme example. Being dead in sin, we can not and will not believe.

The only way we can believe in Jesus Christ unto salvation is for a spiritual resurrection to take place in our hearts, a wonder work of God that Scripture also describes as a new creation and a new birth. This spiritual resurrection is the work of the risen Lord. It is based on the perfect sacrifice of His cross. It is performed in the power of His resurrection. This is made plain in Ephesians 2:4, 5, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ." Colossians 3:1 speaks of the saints being risen with Christ. Jesus works this spiritual resurrection in the hearts and lives of all those whom the Father has given Him.

The spiritual resurrection takes place through the power of Jesus' word. With James and Paul it took place by the power of the word of the risen Jesus, who appeared directly to them. However, the day of personal appearances is gone. Yet the words of Jesus are heard in the preaching of the gospel. Jesus makes His people alive from the dead and brings them to saving faith in Him through the lively preaching of the Word.

The church, therefore, must be faithful in proclaiming this Word of Jesus Christ. It must do that on the Lord's day, in the catechism room, and on the mission field.

And we with our children must seek and embrace this preaching.

It is the power of the risen Lord to raise the dead to life and bring them to saving faith in Him.



Editorial

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

Schism: Disorder

The recent schism in one of our congregations, which has had repercussions throughout the denomination, is a grief for everyone involved. The church of Christ has been rent. Families and friends are divided. Before God we lament, cry for mercy, and submit to His chastening hand (March 1 editorial).

The schism is also a threat to the denomination, since those who have departed are calling us and our children to leave the alleged apostatizing PRCA and join them. So serious is the PRCA's departure that for them not to "come out from among" us and be separate would be sinful disobedience to God. Those who join them, join in making the same statement for themselves. The editorial of March 15 addressed this and the terrible charges that break with the relentless regularity of ocean waves against the PRCA.

The April 1 editorial pointed out that, regarding the doctrine of works, there are two dangers that must always be avoided in Reformed churches. As has been said, "Christ is always crucified between two thieves." On the one hand, a wrong doctrine of "works" may make works part of the ground or means or instrument of our salvation. Works, then, take *credit* for salvation. On the other hand, a *different* error in the doctrine of "works" makes works unimportant, unnecessary, maybe impossible, and probably an affront to justification by faith *without* works. If a preacher enjoins obedience, such preaching is damned as "conditional theology." If a Reformed church will survive, she will always be on guard against both errors.

The present editorial addresses the disorder involved in every schism and particularly this schism. Schism itself is disorder in God's church. But schism is often surrounded by other disorder and this schism is no exception.

To say that disorder is part of the story of this schism is not to deny the seriousness of doctrinal error. Doctrinal error is serious. But God's people must also see

that when doctrinal error is confronted in a disorderly way, schism will be the inevitable result. God is not pleased to correct error through disorderliness. He will judge disorderliness with a heavy hand. Those judgments may well include sinful division. His judgments might not end there.

An older Church Order authority once said (I paraphrase): "The best way to turn a *difficult* church problem into an *impossible-to-solve* church problem is to set aside the biblically based principles of the Church Order." To say that doctrinal controversies are difficult is an understatement. Usually, they are agonizing. Add to that, doctrinal struggles down through the ages rarely have been settled in a few years. Those two realities—the difficulty and length of time—often tempt those involved in controversy to become impatient, grow frustrated, and then resort to behavior that violates the "biblically based principles of the Church Order." This is the "disorder" I Corinthians 14:40 forbids: "Let all things be done decently and in order." Paul is speaking about the orderliness in church life. For "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (v. 33).

What happens when church order is disregarded?

'Private excommunication'

When the proper way of addressing error and ridding the church of false teachers is ignored or shrugged off for one reason or another, one of the first appearances of disorderliness is the disorder of private excommunication. Private excommunication has been common in the church but is rarely exposed as the evil that it certainly is. 'Private excommunication' is my label for conduct that will go something like this. A certain member (or members) of the church decides that another member (usually an officebearer and probably a minister) has a weakness. This certain member does not declare the other member a heretic at first, but initially will insinuate it in various ways and simply declare to his family or friends that this other man is, for example, 'not thoroughly Protestant Reformed.' That is

enough to create momentum in this exercise of ‘private excommunication.’ It can be considered the ‘first step’ of disorderly discipline. Soon, the accusing member has told a few more of his friends and his children have told their friends. By this time already the damage likely will not be undone.

The accusation (which is either slander or backbiting) is not brought to the man himself so that he can repent. It is not brought to his consistory to be adjudicated by the men Christ appointed to judge such charges. The charge is made to other individuals who, in growing numbers, nod their heads at the accusations or insinuations. A consensus has been reached: “This man is not faithful.” No orderly vote is taken, but a ‘decision’ is made, nevertheless. A judgment has been adopted. In the minds and lives of the group the accused is excommunicated. For all practical purposes, he has been put out of the sphere of their churches. This is disorder of the highest magnitude.

If someone would be bold to ask these ‘private excommunicators’ why they speak in such a manner about members in good standing in the church, the concern is probably dismissed because they are only ‘identifying weaknesses in the churches’ as those who want to keep the church strong. But so it goes. No hearing has taken place. No formal grounds have been established officially. The accused has had no ability to answer charges to defend his name. But he has been condemned and excommunicated, nevertheless. This is disorder.

Contrast good order and disorder. When good order is followed, there will be: 1) brotherly admonitions; then 2) formal charges; 3) careful deliberation by office-bearers appointed for such work; 4) well grounded decisions; 5) which can be examined (and protested if need be) and 6) which can be used to teach the other members of the churches what is truth and what is error; also, 7) a penitent errorist is corrected and restored, and an impenitent teacher of false doctrine is removed from office and declared outside the kingdom. Compare that to the disorder of ‘private excommunication’: 1) There are no brotherly admonitions; 2) no formal charges; 3) deliberation takes place over coffee or beer; 4) no grounds are put on paper, which then 5) can be examined by the public; 6) thus, the members of the churches are taught nothing, officially; 7) the accused can do nothing but stand condemned in the court of public opinion. If he wants to respond, he is tempted to use the same disorderly forums in which he was condemned. If he is wise, he will commit his way to God who judges righteously (I Pet. 2:23).

The curse of social media

Fueling the practice of ‘private excommunication’ is the ability to publicize the damning accusations through social media. What only twenty years ago could not have happened now takes place commonly and, it seems, with apparent impunity. What might have remained in a small group a generation ago now goes viral through the Internet within days or even hours. And ‘going viral’ is a good description of the sin. The deadly infection spreads rapidly from one small group to more small groups, which soon become large groups. The small-group email somehow is leaked. And when nothing is done to check the sin, others are emboldened to publish on the Internet their similar criticisms. There is no end of forums through which to get the word out.

Readers understand that there is nothing hypothetical in this at all. It is most serious disorder in the church of Jesus Christ.

But for this sin to do its damage, another reality must be in play. There must be a devil, as they say, not only on someone’s tongue (to *speak* the evil), but in someone else’s *ear* (to give the evil a hearing). In former days private violations of the ninth commandment could be checked somewhat easily by saying, “Now, why do you tell *me* this?” That would often halt the sin in its tracks. But the ability that the Internet has to distance a writer from personal accountability makes it even more difficult to stop.

This explains why my response to friends who ask me, “Have you read...?” is usually, “I don’t read social media posts.” And why my response to their plea, “But can’t you expose the lies, half-truths, and misrepresentations that I’m reading all over the place?” is, “Then I would be guilty of the very evil you speak of.” A Christian ought not listen to evil. If he does hear it, he must be willing to respond to it in a Christian manner: go to the brother; if there is no repentance, bring him to his consistory.

It is more than a “by the way” here to say that any man who does hear evil and quickly believes it without careful investigation shows himself by that to be wholly unfit to be an officebearer (certainly), and unworthy even to claim interest in Jesus’ ninth commandment. These ignore the promise Reformed Christians make in the Heidelberg: “I will not judge nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard.” More than once this magazine has reminded our readers of the important place Proverbs 18 ought to have in our lives: “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him” (v. 17) and “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto

him” (v. 13). To translate this in language our children understand: “Before you form a judgment about anyone or anything, you better hear both sides of every story, or you show yourself to be foolish.” It is a great irony that some ‘defenders of truth’ will so easily violate the commandment about speaking truth.

Judging rashly and unheard is a plague these days, and hastens the evil activity of ‘private excommunication.’

Justifying the evil

A defense of this present disorderliness is, “But error in the church is so serious that we may not be silent. Truth is so important that to wait for protests and appeals to work will result in the loss of truth.” Or this, “Article 55 of the Church Order and the Formula of Subscription require officebearers to defend truth and expose error.”¹

The Church Order was developed carefully over the course of centuries and adopted in church assemblies by mature officebearers who had been “around the block” a few times. They understood controversy. They were determined to preserve truth. They had a holy hatred of error. For this reason, woven into the very fabric of the Church Order is the calling for officebearers to preach truth everywhere, adhere to and vindicate sound doctrine, assault error, expose the lie, and then bind one’s self to this calling by signing the Formula of Subscription (see Church Order, Arts. 4, 9, 16, 18, 23, 44, 49, 53, 54, 55, 61, 68, 71, 72, 79, 80).

At the same time, these fathers knew that rooting out error must be done in an orderly manner. The orderly manner is given in Article 31. The *Standard Bearer* has shown what the proper and historically Protestant Reformed understanding of Article 31 is. It is disorderly in the church of Jesus Christ to expose error and ignore the church orderly way of Article 31. Any church or group that sanctions that disorder will soon find itself plagued with it. Now, it seems, anyone may make his own judgment that ‘this elder’ is embracing error or ‘that minister’ is promoting the lie. Then, rather than bringing an orderly charge of sin against him, they will publish a newsletter or blog post and carry out private excommunication. The church may not permit this.

People of God, this is a brotherly, but sharp warning.

Regarding the calling given to officebearers in Article 55, it should be noted that there is an important difference between exposing error *without* and exposing error *within* the churches. Every minister must write and preach against errors that threaten from the outside, at times even naming names of preachers or books that promote heresy. But when a threat is detected from *within*, the way of addressing it is not from the pulpit or in writing to the public, but the orderly way of bringing carefully formulated charges to a consistory for Christ’s *officebearers* to judge.

Imagine *your* minister being called a heretic by his colleague in the neighboring church. Imagine *your* husband who is an elder being labeled unorthodox by a fellow elder in the same congregation. This disorder must not be allowed even if one thinks that the error is so serious that he cannot wait to address it in the orderly way.

In the end, the ‘heretic’ will be cut off by the private excommunicators. But his ‘excommunication’ will not have been by Christ. This disorderly binding on earth is not bound in heaven (Matt. 18:18).

The other defense of the disorderliness is, “The orderly way is not working because the churches are already so full of disorder. Why, then, would one attempt to walk the church orderly way if the system is broken?” If one reads and is inclined to believe the whistleblowers’ accounts of supposed corruption and disorder in the churches without investigating the matter for himself, the reminder again is in order: “He that is first in his own cause, seems just....”

But disorder may not be justified as a response to disorder, any more than we would justifying uprising against the American government because it is so full of corruption.

“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

It is *necessary* and it is *possible* both to defend the truth against error and live orderly. It is necessary and it is possible to do both *at the same time*. If a church departs from either, she cannot survive because God is not the author of confusion.

May God grant orderliness “in all the churches of the saints.”

¹ Article 55 reads: “To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.” (Cf. prca.org/about/official-standards/church-order.)



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor-elect of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI, currently missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland

Critical theory

Critical theory beyond postmodernism

Christianity is the revelation of the truth. Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and He gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate: “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37). Our society is increasingly hostile to truth, not only to the truth of God’s Word, but also to the very idea of truth.

The modern assault on truth was concentrated for a while in postmodernism. Although many people view postmodernism as a philosophical theory with little practical value, our society has adopted it. If your unbelieving neighbour says, “That is true for you, but not true for me,” or “You have *your* truth, while I have *my* truth,” he is, whether he knows it or not, a postmodernist. If you hear someone say, “She spoke *her* truth” or “He spoke *his* truth,” you have heard the parroting of postmodernist principles. If you try to reason with someone by appealing to facts and data, and he responds with an appeal to his “lived experience,” you are dealing with a postmodernist. A postmodernist echoes Pilate’s scornful response to Jesus in John 18:38: “What is truth?” He goes further: he denies the very possibility and knowability of truth.

One book that I have found helpful in trying to understand the world “all around us” is *Cynical Theories* by Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay.¹ The authors of this book are not Christians—they are traditional liberals—but their analysis is very useful. Their thesis is this: postmodernism has morphed into critical theory. Postmodernism is critical theory’s abstract grandfather, while critical theory is postmodernism’s feisty granddaughter, full of youthful idealism, and itching to transform the world. Postmodernism was a quiet scholar, content to identify and lament unjust power structures

and oppressive social constructs, while critical theory, by energizing the youth, now demands the deconstruction of society, which it views as fundamentally unjust. The readers of the *Standard Bearer* would do well to understand critical theory, too, because it is aggressively promoted at secular (and even Christian) universities to the youth, it is the philosophical foundation of much political activism, and it is extremely hostile to Christianity.

Pluckrose and Lindsay explain postmodernism as “radical scepticism to the very possibility of obtaining objective knowledge” (22). Since there is no reality or no truth, language, that is, the way in which we talk about things, is determinative. Critical theory has morphed the “language is power” idea into the mantra “language is violence.” Language is supposedly violence because the powerful control how words and expressions are used. The result, it is said, is that the privileged in society marginalize “minorities,” even when they are unaware of it. Pluckrose and Lindsay explain:

If knowledge is a construct of power, which functions through ways of talking about things, knowledge can be changed and power structures toppled by changing the way we talk about things. Thus, applied postmodernism focuses on controlling discourses, especially by problematizing language and imagery it deems...harmful (61).

Examples of critical theory

Pluckrose and Lindsay examine various critical theories to demonstrate how critical theory has now become the “Truth,” which may not be questioned, with the result that prejudice is assumed and must be identified, while those who question the narrative are driven out of society or “canceled.”

The authors offer a helpful comparison between different mindsets, which can be applied to the different critical theories. On the one hand, the traditional liberal says, “All humans have the capacity to be rational and scientific, but individuals will vary widely. There-

¹ Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Universities Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and How This Harms Everyone* (UK: Swift Press, 2020). The authors consistently write “Theory” in “critical Theory” with an upper case T. I will not follow that example.

fore, all humans must have all opportunities and freedoms.” (The Christian would not disagree with that). On the other hand, the advocate of critical theory says,

The West has constructed the idea that rationality and science are good in order to perpetuate its own power and marginalize nonrational, nonscientific forms of knowledge production from elsewhere. Therefore, we must now devalue white, Western ways of knowing for belonging to white Westerners and promote Eastern ones in order to equalize the power imbalance (76).

In short, Western society has developed in the belief that certain dominant characteristics (white, male, heterosexual, cisgender, etc.) are good, while other characteristics (black, female, homosexual, transgender) are bad. Therefore, we must now devalue whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, cisgenderism, etc., in order to empower oppressed “victim groups.” The Christian objects to this premise, for there is mixing of categories here: race and gender are morally insignificant, while sexuality and gender identity are morally significant, for Christianity is more concerned about *behavior* than immutable character traits. Critical theory views moral judgments about homosexuality, for example, in the same category as racism.

Queer theory attacks the idea of normality as a social construct, especially with respect to sex, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, it rejects biology as a source of reliable knowledge and regards the very existence of categories traditionally determined by biology such as male and female to be “oppressive” (89). Queer theorists see “the binary” (the choice between two—male and female, heterosexual and homosexual) as deeply problematic; instead, they view sex, gender, and sexuality as existing on a spectrum. Queer theory seeks to “disrupt any expectations that people should fit into a binary position with regard to sex or gender, and to undermine any assumptions that sex or gender are related to or dictate sexuality,” while “queering” (yes—it is a verb) “is about unmaking any sense of the normal, in order to liberate people from the expectations that norms carry” (94). Thus we have increasing numbers of “non-binary” people, who must be accommodated through a change in the law.

Pluckrose and Lindsay’s critique of queer theory is insightful:

Queer Theory...tends to render itself baffling and irrelevant if not positively alienating to most members of the society it wishes to change. Queer activists reliant on queer Theory tend to act with surprising entitlement and aggression—attitudes which most people find objectionable—not least by ridiculing

normative sexualities and genders and depicting those who recognize them as backwards and boorish. People generally do not appreciate being told that their sex, gender, and sexuality are not real, or are wrong or bad—something one would think queer Theorists might appreciate better than anyone (109-110).

Queer theory is directly contrary to the words of Jesus Christ: “Have ye not read, that he that made them at the beginning made them male and female?” (Matt. 19:4). Paul rejects queer theory, which, of course, had not yet emerged from the corrupt mind of man, in Romans 1:27: “The men [literally, “males”], leaving the natural use of the woman [literally, “female”], burned in their lust one toward another; men with men [literally, “males with males”] working that which is unseemly [literally, “the shameful thing”].” In queer theory there is no such thing as “male” and “female.”

Critical race theory and intersectionality explain how society is racist, even systemically and irredeemably racist, so that everyone is racist, without actually behaving in a racist manner. Formerly, a racist was a vile individual who mistreated others because of their skin color or nationality. Racism has no place among Christians because we must love our neighbor regardless of race, nationality, or creed. Racism is a wicked assault on the unity and catholicity of the church, for Christians are brethren, confess one gospel, and eat a common bread at the Lord’s Table: “There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11).

Martin Luther King Jr. declared, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Modern critical race theory goes beyond King, or contradicts him: if you belong to the privileged class (the cultural hegemony, that is, if you are white), you are racist *regardless of the content of your character*. The issue in critical race theory is the application of the accepted “Truth” of society’s systemic racism.

Critical race Theory sounds rather racist itself, in ascribing profound failures of morals and character to white people (as consequences of being white in a white-dominant society). We are told that racism is embedded in culture and that we cannot escape it. We hear that white people are inherently racist. We are told that racism is “prejudice plus power;” therefore, only white people can be racist. We are informed that only people of color can talk about racism, that white people need to just listen, and that they don’t have the “racial stamina” to engage it. We hear that not seeing people in

terms of their race (being color-blind) is, in fact, racist and an attempt to ignore the pervasive racism that dominates society and perpetuates white privilege. We can hear these mantras in many spheres of life, but they are particularly prevalent on college campuses (121).

Critical race Theory's hallmark paranoid mind-set, which assumes racism is everywhere, always just waiting to be found, is extremely unlikely to be helpful or healthy for those who adopt it.... If we train young people to read insult, hostility, and prejudice into every interaction, they may increasingly see the world as hostile to them and fail to thrive in it.... It is bad psychology to tell people who do not believe that they are racist—who may even actively despise racism—that there is nothing they can do to stop themselves from being racist—and then ask them to help you. It is even less helpful to tell them that even their good intentions are proof of their latent racism. Worst of all is to set up double-blinds, like telling them [that] if they notice race it is because they are racist, but if they don't notice race it's because their privilege affords them the luxury of not noticing race, which is racist (132, 134).

The fruit of critical theory

Critical theory empowers “social justice,” for if inequality is presupposed, then injustice is everywhere, whether it is proved or not, and it must be eliminated. Why is person “A” less successful than person “B”? If person “A” belongs to a minority or marginalized group, while person “B” does not, then the answer is clear: “Disparate outcomes can have one, and only one, explanation, and it is prejudicial bigotry. The question is just identifying how it manifests in the given situation” (128). Critical theory, warn Pluckrose and Lindsay, “refuses to submit its ideas to rigorous scrutiny, rejects that kind of examination on principle, and asserts that any attempts to subject it to thoughtful criticism are immoral, insincere, and proof of its thesis” (199). One scholar of critical theory (and she is by no means alone) “advocates shutting down [student disagreement in the classroom]”: “It is dangerous to allow students to express disagreement.... Disagreement would allow dominant discourses to be reasserted, voiced, and heard...it is essential to control what may and may not be said” (200-201). Robin DiAngelo in her bestselling book, *White Privilege: Why It Is So Hard to Talk to White People About Race* (2018), argues in a similar fashion:

White people are complicit beneficiaries of racism and white supremacy. This is the Truth According to Social Justice—disagreement is not allowed. DiAngelo

is quite explicit about this. If disagreeing, remaining silent, and going away are all evidence of [white] fragility—mere “defensive moves”—the only way to avoid being “fragile” is to remain put, show no negative emotions, and agree with the Truth—after which one must actively participate in discovering The Truth, that is, learning how to deconstruct whiteness and white privilege, which is billed as the necessary work of “antiracism” (205-206).

Since critical theory allows no dissent, and since the work of its scholars is to “scrutinize texts, events...and every other conceivable cultural artefact for hidden bigotry, then expose it and purge it and its sources from society—or at least access to the means of cultural production” (222), it ought not be surprising that the fruit of critical theory and social justice is “cancel culture.” If social justice activism is offended, the only solution is to “cancel” the offender, which means that if a person has ever said something that is judged by social justice activists to be wrong—racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, etc.—he and his work must be purged from society. Such a person will lose his position, have his career destroyed, his reputation ruined, and his books “burned.” If they are not cast into actual flames, social justice warriors will insist on a technological purge: he and his works will be expunged from Amazon, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms. Sometimes a person can be spared (for now) if he issues a sufficiently abject apology and promises to educate himself about his “privilege,” but the mob is not known for forgiveness. Pluckrose and Lindsay warn:

Humans are capable of great empathy and of horrifying callousness and violence.... By seeking to expand our circle of empathy ever wider, liberal humanism has achieved unprecedented human equality.... By seeking to divide humans into marginalized identity groups and their oppressors, Social Justice risks fueling our worst tendencies—our tribalism and vengefulness. This cannot work out well for women, or for minority groups, or for society as a whole (258).

The new Administration under U.S. President Joe Biden supports social justice activism, although, as with all politicians, one wonders how much of this is conviction and how much is political expediency. As soon as Biden entered the White House, he signed “Executive Order on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation” (January 20, 2021), which allows people in U.S. federal buildings, including public schools, to use the facilities pertaining to their gender identity and expression. President Biden and Vice-president Kamala Harris also support “The Equality

Act,” which the U.S. House of Representatives just passed for the second time and which now heads to a deeply divided Senate.² Biden has also appointed radical leftists to Cabinet positions. One historic nomination is Richard “Rachel” Levine, a biological male identifying as, and dressing as, a woman, to the position of Assistant Secretary of Health. Levine, a pediatrician, believes that gender-confused children should be allowed to “transition” to their preferred gender with puberty-blocking drugs and sex-realignment surgery.

If you are bewildered about how you suddenly woke up in a world where there are hundreds of genders, where “misgendering” is offensive and even a crime, where everything from your childhood seems to be

“racist” and must either be cancelled or have warnings about “potential offensive content” attached to it, now you know— it is not that people have suddenly become hypersensitive, but that critical theory, once confined to academia, has become mainstream and radicalized. In such a world the church is called to live, to such a world the church is called to witness, and such a world will sooner rather than later seek to “cancel” the church. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.... In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 15:18-19; 16:33).

² See “The Equality Act” in *Standard Bearer* (vol. 95, no. 19, August 1, 2019), <https://sb.rfpa.org/the-equality-act>.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches residing in Spokane, WA

Jonah's fish

Jonah 1:17

The story of Jonah's being swallowed by a “great fish” is often ridiculed by unbelievers. It even figured in the famous Scopes trial in 1925 in an exchange between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. Darrow, counsel for the defense of John Scopes who was accused of teaching human evolution contrary to Tennessee law, asked Bryan: “But when you read that Jonah swallowed the whale—or that the whale swallowed Jonah...how do you literally interpret that?” To which question Bryan, the counsel for the prosecution, answered: “When I read that a big fish swallowed Jonah...I believe in a God who can make a whale and can make a man and make both do what He pleases.” Bryan, of course, was crucified by the media, especially by H. L. Mencken, who called Bryan a “buffoon” and his arguments in defense of the Bible and creationism, “theologic bilge.”

Liberal Bible scholars, who do not believe anything miraculous and who waste inordinate amounts of paper and time seeking natural explanations for the supernatural or explaining the supernatural away entirely, also

reject the historicity of Jonah, especially the story of his being swallowed by a fish. Most see the story of Jonah as parable or allegory and raise the same objections to the story as do secular evolutionists. Over against such unbelief, we believe that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and that he lived three days and nights in the belly of the fish. Our attitude and that of all who believe the inspiration of the Bible is that of William Jennings Bryan, who also said: “If the Bible had said that Jonah swallowed the whale, I would believe it.”

There are several reasons for this article, however, not all of them by way of insisting on Jonah's historicity. Believing that the story is historical, we also believe that the story of Jonah and the great fish is the story of a miracle, a miracle of grace, and a story that points to the saving work of Jesus. It is, as well, a demonstration of the great truth that salvation is of the Lord, for the great fish is part of the story of Jonah's salvation and the salvation of Nineveh.

As to the authenticity of the story, the reference to Jonah in Matthew 12:40 ought to lay all doubts to rest.

Jesus, the Son of God, believed that Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, and if He believed it, we may not doubt it.

The Bible does not actually speak of a “whale” though that is how the story is usually remembered, due to the translation of the KJV (AV) in Matthew 12:40. The Hebrew Old Testament uses the word *dag* or “fish” (cf. Dagon, the fish-god of the Phoenicians, I Sam. 5:2-7). Matthew 12:40 uses a Greek word from which we get our word “cetacean,” a word that refers to any great sea-creature, not necessarily a whale.

There are those who speculate on the actual identity of the creature, attempting to name a creature large enough to swallow a man and suggesting that it was a Whale Shark, a Great White Shark, a Sperm Whale or even some extinct sea creature, but they miss the point of Jonah 1:17. So do those who try to prove from other incidents that a man can live in the belly of a fish or a whale for three days, something that is ordinarily impossible.¹ Jonah 1:17 puts all that speculation and argument to rest with the words, “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.”

That God prepared the creature that swallowed Jonah may very well mean that the whale or fish was something never before and never after seen. Even if it was some creature we know, it would have had to be miraculously “prepared” for Jonah to live inside it for three days. The whole story is the story of a miracle, not only the preparation of the fish itself, but its presence when Jonah was thrown overboard, its swallowing Jonah when he was about to drown, and its spitting Jonah out again three days later on dry land and in the direction of Nineveh.

As with all miracles, it is also a miracle of *grace*, sovereign saving grace shown both to Jonah and to Nineveh. Always in the Bible miracles are not just events that make us wonder, but events that point to the wonder of God’s great salvation that rescues us from death and destruction and makes us children of God. For this reason miracles are always signs, signs that point in one way or another to something greater.

Jesus makes reference to the “sign of the prophet Jonas” in Matthew 12:39, 16:4, and Luke 11:29, 30, clearly referring to Jonah and the great fish. He does this to those who asked for a sign from heaven, a sign that He was the promised Messiah, the Savior. Jesus refuses to give them a new sign, referring them to the sign of Jonah. If they had understood that sign of Jonah the prophet, they would have believed in Jesus, for that sign, like all signs, pointed to Him. If they did not understand that sign and did not believe in Him, there was no sign that would make them believe.

In this is also the similarity, the only similarity between Jonah and Jesus. Jonah was not a type of Jesus. He could not be a type, for it was his disobedience that landed him in the belly of the fish and his repentance that set him back on the way to Nineveh. Jesus was in the grave as part of His perfect obedience, and it was not in the way of repentance that He arose from the dead but as the Victor over that dark domain.

Hugh Martin in his commentary on Jonah goes to great lengths to prove that Jonah was a type, mentioning five similarities. In both cases he says there was a death and resurrection, in both cases the death and burial are judicial processes, that both with Jesus and Jonah the burial and resurrection “constituted the gate by which the word of Jehovah went forth from the Jewish to the Gentile world.” He speaks of both the experiences of Jonah and Jesus as an enforcement of the gospel message and adds that, just as Jonah’s experience was his preparation for new loyalty and obedience, so Christ’s risen life is the source of

newness of life and service.²

Much of this, however, is contrived. Jonah’s experience was indeed preparation for new loyalty and obedience, but it was not the source of that loyalty and obedience as was Christ’s work. As Martin himself says, if Jonah’s new obedience was a type of anything, it was a type of our new obedience, not Christ’s obedience. Neither is Jonah’s experience of the belly of hell and his deliverance a “death and resurrection” that picture Christ’s death and resurrection.

The similarity between Jesus and Jonah begins and

As with all miracles, it is also a miracle of grace, sovereign saving grace shown both to Jonah and to Nineveh. Always in the Bible miracles are not just events that make us wonder, but events that point to the wonder of God’s great salvation that rescues us from death and destruction and makes us children of God. For this reason miracles are always signs, signs that point in one way or another to something greater.

¹ Cf. the story of James Bartley, who was supposed to have been swallowed by a whale and to have lived for several days in the whale’s belly, a story that is fictitious.

² Hugh Martin, *Jonah* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 205-225.

ends with the fact that what happened to Jonah was a miracle: he was miraculously swallowed by the fish, lived miraculously in the belly of the fish for three days and nights, and was miraculously delivered from the belly of the fish. That miracle of Jonah was a sign that pointed to the miracle of salvation of which Christ's burial was a part. The sign that was Jonah, miraculously saved, pointed to the miraculous reality of Christ's saving work, though only in a small way.

Jesus says in Luke 11:30 that the miracle of Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites. That is difficult to understand but must mean that the Ninevites somehow learned of what had happened to Jonah and saw in that something of the miracle of God's great salvation in Jesus Christ. That would explain the mystery of Nineveh's repentance when all Jonah preached was "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." He may have said nothing of the promises of the coming Messiah who would be a light to the Gentiles, but he could not help being a living testimony to salvation by a miracle of grace. Thus, the Ninevites had the gospel preached to them, not just the threat of eternal destruction. Jonah was and is a demonstration of the great truth that salvation is of the Lord, and so he remains a sign to us, as he was to the Ninevites and to the Jews of Jesus' day, a sign that points us to Jesus Christ, the revelation of that great salvation.

What a wonder God's salvation is! He used every means to save Jonah—the storm, the rebuke of the heathen sailors, and the specially prepared fish. He then used a disobedient prophet to bring the gospel to the Ninevites, first making him a demonstration of His great salvation in the way of Jonah's disobedience and its consequences. He made Jonah such a living example, because even after he repented, Jonah remained reluctant and grudging, trying to fulfil his commission by proclaiming only Nineveh's imminent destruction.

The sign and miracle of the prophet Jonah should remind us of what Paul says in Romans 11:33-36: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Jonah was a sign indeed, but so are we all, for wheth-

er grown up in a covenant family or rescued from the gutter, whether coming to faith at a very early age or believing in Christ in the last moments of one's life, we all—saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ dead, buried, descended into hell and risen again—point to Him as the only fountain and source of salvation. We do that by our witness and words, by our life of obedience, but also simply in being saved, lost and dead sinners that we are.

Like the storm God sent on the Mediterranean Sea, the fish that swallowed Jonah was Jonah's fish, specially prepared by God for Jonah, used by God to bring His disobedient prophet to repentance and then also to put him back on the way to Nineveh. God used a fish only in that instance, while in other instances He uses a sermon, years of covenant instruction, the witness of a friend or neighbor, the example of godly wife or husband, employer or employee; but salvation is always a miracle and the miracle is always the miracle of God's grace in Christ.

We still sing it, thinking not of Jonah but of ourselves:

They that traffic on the sea,
While unceasing watch they keep,
See Jehovah's majesty
And His wonders in the deep;
For He bids the stormwind fly,
Lifting ocean's waves on high.

By the billows heavenward tossed,
Down to dreadful depths again,
Troubled much, their courage lost,
Reeling, they like drunken men
Find their skill and power o'erthrown;
None can save but God alone.

To Jehovah then they cry
In their trouble, and He saves,
Drives the darkness from the sky,
Calms the storm and stills the waves,
Makes their sad forebodings cease,
To their haven guides in peace.³

³ *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018), #295 (Ps. 107).



Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Constantinople (AD 381): Other decisions

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2021, p. 250.

The Second Ecumenical Council settled the controversy regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. It also made decisions regarding church government. Two such decisions we noted in our last article: it required bishops to labor within their own geographic jurisdictions; and it stated that the Bishop of Constantinople receives honor after the Bishop of Rome. We conclude our treatment of this Council by noting some of its other decisions, or “canons.”

Maximus never was a bishop

A certain Maximus considered himself to be a bishop, and ordained other men to church office. Some of his contemporaries allege that Maximus was a smooth flatterer who intruded into office, rather than being legitimately put into it. In its fourth canon, the Council declared that he never was a bishop, and that those whom he ordained did not in fact hold office.

Intruders generally do not admit that they are intruding, and always present themselves as having the church’s best interests in mind. However, the very fact that they entered office in an unlawful way is itself proof that these men will not promote peace and unity in the truth. The church must declare that they are not officebearers.

Article 31 of our Belgic Confession reminds all who desire church office to wait to be chosen “by a lawful election by the church,” and “not to intrude by indecent means,” in order “that he may have testimony of his calling and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord.”

Canons five, six, and seven

Scholars debate whether canons five, six, and seven were made by the Second Ecumenical Council in 381, or by a provincial council held in Constantinople in 382. The latter is probable. Yet these decisions are often included in the decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council.

The fifth canon provides a response to a letter from bishops from the West; we need spend no time with it. The seventh canon regards the manner in which the

church will receive heretics back into her number. But the sixth is most relevant for the church in every age.

How to treat allegations against bishops

Many people were bringing “slanderosly fabricate[d] charges,”¹ against orthodox bishops. Why? The Council said that they intended “nothing else than to stain the reputation of the priests and raise up disturbances among the peaceful laity.” The sixth canon of the Council gave guidelines for how it would treat such cases.

Some cases the Council refused to hear. These included allegations that a bishop had physically harmed or materially defrauded a person. These were personal offenses; the Council would deal only with ecclesiastical offenses.

When treating allegations regarding the bishop’s work, the Council would first examine the accuser. If it found the accuser to be a heretic, the Council would not treat the allegation any further. A heretic, it said, was either one whom the church had already cast out, or one who separated himself from the lawfully ordained bishops to set up his own bishops and church organization.

The Council also would not treat the accusations of any who was excommunicated or under discipline “until they have cleared away the charge against themselves.” If one was not under discipline, but had other charges brought against him, he must clear up those matters before the Council would hear him.

The second step the Council took was to tell those who were not heretics or under discipline to bring their charge to the provincial bishops first. If the provincial bishops could not agree, the accuser could take his matter to “a greater synod.”

One who did so was also to promise in writing to submit to a penalty if the Council, in treating his matter, found that he slandered the bishop whom he had

¹ This and every subsequent quote is from “Canons” as found in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 14: *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988 reprint), 183.

accused. One who would not follow this prescribed route would not be heard, “forasmuch as he has cast contempt upon the Canons, and brought reproach upon the order of the Church.”

Sound familiar? Our classes and synods do not treat matters that are not ecclesiastical, or matters that have not been finished in the minor assemblies. They do not treat protests or allegations from people who are not

members of our churches, nor from those who are under discipline for another matter. And they insist on following a right procedure.

In general, our practice regarding what the assemblies treat and whom they will hear is an old practice. It is older than the Reformation. It was the practice of the early church. Early church fathers recognized that it was an application of biblical principles.



Taking heed to the doctrine

Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

As to our good works (10)

Relating good works and justification (f)

What justification is

When God justifies the guilty, elect sinner by imputing to him the righteousness of Christ, He not only subtracts something from the sinner’s account but He also adds to it. The Reformed faith teaches that in the act of justification God executes a kind of legal subtraction in clearing the sinner’s account of all his guilt. God pardons the sinner by canceling all his debts and declaring, “I forgive you. It is as if you never had nor committed any sin” (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, LD 23). In the one act of justification, God also executes a kind of legal addition by imputing or reckoning to the sinner’s account the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. God declares, “I pronounce you righteous. It is as if you have fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for you” (HC, LD 23). In its explanation of the doctrine of justification, Belgic Confession, Article 23 opens with the words, “We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ’s sake,” and then it immediately adds, “and that therein our righteousness before God is implied.” Even when justification is described as being essentially the legal negation of “remission,” the positive or legal addition of “righteousness” is still, necessarily, implied. When God justifies us, therefore, He removes our debt and adds to our account the positive righteousness of Christ so that we are reckoned before Him as perfect law-keepers who have given to God all the obedience His law demands.

Vivid is the portrayal of this wonder of justification in Zechariah 3. Joshua the priest stood on trial before Jehovah in the filthy garments of his own unrighteous-

ness and God graciously took those filthy garments away. But God did more. He clothed Joshua, as He does every believer, with the clean garments of Christ’s righteous works (Zech. 3:3-5; Rev. 19:7-8). Justification with its two essential aspects—my filthy garment of unrighteousness removed and Christ’s spotless garment of perfect righteousness bestowed—is simply astonishing, and has massive ramifications for our salvation and life with God in His covenant. Robed in a garment of infinite worth, the believer exclaims, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Is. 61:10).

The gospel wonder of justification turns our hearts and minds to the perfect works of Christ who is our righteousness before God. Christ’s perfect works on our behalf are the basis for all that justification is as both a legal subtraction and a legal addition. God cannot cancel our debts unless Christ has paid them in full, and God cannot add perfect, positive righteousness to our account unless Christ has perfectly obeyed God’s strict law and fulfilled all righteousness for us. Always and forever we must learn Christ in all the glory of His saving works. The only sure defense against the perennial threat of ascribing to our good works a function they do not have is never merely to draw careful theological lines demonstrating what place and function our good works do and do not have, but to learn *Christ* and preach *Christ* and the gospel of His perfect works.

Christ’s righteousness

In order to help us understand and appreciate the

constituent elements of the perfect righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us in justification, the Reformed tradition typically employs a distinction between the passive and active obedience of Christ as He stood as our substitute under the law. Christ's *passive* obedience refers to His suffering of divine punishment for our transgressions. His *active* obedience refers to His willing and perfect performance of all the precepts of God's law on our behalf. The distinguishable ideas of passive and active obedience may never be separated because in all His suffering Christ obeyed, and in all His obeying Christ suffered. Nevertheless, the distinction can be helpful because it draws our attention to the gospel truth that we are saved by Christ's obedience.

Jesus willingly came under the law for us as our representative Head and was required to satisfy the demands of the law of God in two respects. First, all the punishment that the law threatens for the transgression of its precepts must be suffered by the one whom the law condemns as guilty. Secondly, all the obedience that the law demands in all of its precepts must be rendered in full. In justification, only if the strict demands of His justice are perfectly satisfied can God pardon us of our iniquity and pronounce us righteous, thereby receiving us into His favor and love as a covenant God.

Divine justice was satisfied in full for us when the Mediator Jesus Christ came under God's law in our stead. Jesus was "made sin" for us (II Cor. 5:21) and suffered for our sins, the just suffering for the unjust all the curses and penal judgments of God's wrath (I Pet. 3:18). Christ also obeyed in our place by rendering all the obedience that the law demands: "So by the obedience of one shall many be made [constituted] righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Our Mediator obtained perfect righteousness as the righteousness of God that can be imputed unto us in justification.

Christ's obedience in Scripture

The Scriptures not only teach that Christ suffered all the punishment of the law in our place, but also what we might call His "active obedience." Christ was born of Mary under the law (Gal. 4:4) so that He who is the Son of God and Lawgiver lived all His days under the law with all of its demands. Already at twelve years of age He expressed His firm resolve to execute every command of His heavenly Father (Luke 2:49). As the Mediator of the covenant, Jesus knew He was no private person under the law but the representative Head of all the elect. Therefore, He commenced His ministry of reconciliation at the Jordan determined to keep every ordinance of the Father for our salvation, saying thus to John the Baptist, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it

becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Jesus carried out His ministry declaring, "For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38); "as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31); and according to prophecy, "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7, citing Psalm 40).

During His busy preaching ministry, Jesus declared to the crowds of Palestine that He did not come to destroy the law but to satisfy its every demand with perfect obedience as to letter and spirit, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17-18). As the servant of Jehovah He obeyed and even *learned* obedience by the things that He suffered (Heb. 5:8). He was obedient His whole life, including at the end when obedience meant suffering the torments of hell in His soul on the accursed tree, "...he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

Jesus is the Lamb without blemish because the law finds in Him perfect obedience and not even the smallest taint of nature or conduct (I Pet. 1:19). He is the goal of the whole unbelievably detailed law written out over the pages of the Old Testament (Rom. 10:4). He perfectly fulfilled the moral law in loving God with all His heart, mind, soul, and strength. Also, all the various institutions respecting meats and drinks, the observance of days and feasts, various washings and purifications, and all the seemingly endless sacrifices find their fulfillment in Him. Christ sealed His perfect obedience to God with the declaration, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Obedient Jesus is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6), whom God has made unto us righteousness (I Cor. 1:30), even an everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24), so that if we are found in Him we have the righteousness of God (Phil. 3:9) witnessed by the law and prophets (Rom. 3:21). Obedience sharply distinguishes the two heads, first and last: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Jesus is the only man who has ever lived His whole life in perfect obedience.

Christ's obedience in our confessions

The Reformed confessions do justice to the biblical teaching of Christ's saving obedience on our behalf. We are assured in the Lord's Supper "that all His sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God" (HC, LD 29), and that "He hath

fulfilled for us all obedience to the divine law and righteousness” (Lord’s Supper Form). As believers, we are always “relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in Him” (BC, Art. 23), so that the mark of all true Christians is that they are “continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ” (BC, Art. 29). That Christ represented us under the law so that His obedience can be imputed to us as our righteousness in justification

is taught in Belgic Confession, Article 22, “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.”

Next time we will say more about Christ’s “active obedience” in Scripture, and then begin considering the saving significance of His obedience as we relate it to us, our salvation (specifically covenant fellowship), and our obedience.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Protestant Reformed Missions Years of trial: Missions threatened (1947-1953) (3)

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2021, p. 161.

There were divisions among the members of the Mission Committee and among the members of the committee appointed by First PRC of Grand Rapids. The Lord had now provided our churches with two missionaries who were to work together in the labors of home missions. In 1948 there were two possible places to perform their work: in Lynden, Washington and in Ontario, Canada among the Dutch immigrants who had been members of the Liberated Churches (LC) in the Netherlands. Some men on the Mission Committee and First PRC committee wanted to keep our missionaries together, focusing their labors in Lynden. Others wanted to send them to labor in Canada among the immigrants there.

There were a few obstacles standing in the way of a possible work in Canada. First, there was the language barrier. Our missionaries were not fluent in the Dutch language. Second, the immigrants were scattered, with no central location in which to labor. Third, there were the obvious doctrinal differences between the LC and the PRC on our view of the covenant. The LC believed that God’s covenant was conditional. The PRC were wobbling in their view. The prominent leaders of our churches strongly taught that the covenant is unconditional. Other ministers insisted that the difference between a conditional or unconditional covenant was not all that important and ought not hinder us from working among the Liberated immigrants. There was also debate over whether we ought to divide the labors

of our two missionaries, sending one to Lynden and the other to Ontario. Both the Mission Committee and the committee of First PRC were deadlocked. The decision was made, therefore, to take the whole matter with all its pros and cons to the 1948 Synod of the PRC for resolution.

Synod of 1948 did not help. It became evident from the lengthy discussion on the floor as well as from the advice of the committee of pre-advice that there were differences among the delegates on the issue of whether the Mission Committee and First PRC ought to separate the missionaries and permit each of them to labor in a different field. The committee of pre-advice came with this recommendation to synod: “a. To do missionary work in Canada. b. That Synod consider to seek to obtain a Holland-speaking missionary in the place of one of our present missionaries” (*PRC Acts of Synod 1948*, p. 97). This advice implied the desire of some on synod to replace one of the present missionaries and divide their labors, sending one of them to labor in Canada while the other labored in Lynden, WA. This advice was rejected, however.

A substitute motion was made on the floor of synod and passed. “A. That synod reject the proposition of Committee I (the committee of pre-advice)...but to continue with our present missionaries. B. That synod advise to send our present missionaries to Lynden, Washington. C. That Synod advise that we continue our mis-

sionary endeavor in Canada and make provisions to do so” (*Acts* 1948, pp. 50, 51). By these decisions synod confirmed that the Mission Committee must continue its labors in Lynden with both missionaries. That was helpful. However, how was the Mission Committee going to continue our “missionary endeavor in Canada”? What provisions could be made to assist the Mission Committee and First PRC in this endeavor?

This decision of synod was made on June 4. A few weeks later at its meeting on June 28 the Mission Committee made the following decision.

To present the following recommendations to the consistory [of First PRC]:

1. That one missionary labor in Canada and the other in Lynden, WA.
2. That the man who labors in Canada be assisted by Holland-speaking ministers of this community, and the consistories be asked to relinquish their ministers for the purpose as the occasion demands.
3. That the missionary laboring in Canada seek a centrally located place of residence.
4. That Rev. E. Knott labor in Lynden and Rev. W. Hofman labor in Canada and that they take up their work as soon as possible.
5. That it be left to the discretion of the two missionaries whether or not they should do the preliminary work in Lynden together for a period of approximately six weeks.
6. That the missionary at Lynden investigate the West coast, as for example, Ripon California, as possible fields of labor, as the opportunity presents itself.¹

These recommendations were presented to the Consistory of First PRC and were, in turn, adopted by the Consistory too.

Rev. E. Knott protested this decision to the next meeting of the Mission Committee. It was decided to have a joint meeting with First PRC Consistory. A motion was made to “comply with the request of Rev. Knott,” but this motion failed. Knott then expressed his willingness to comply. This was not the end of the matter. Rev. G. M. Ophoff lodged another protest of a much more serious nature against the Consistory of First PRC. In this lengthy protest Ophoff contended that the Mission Committee and First PRC had violated the Church Order, Articles 31 and 84. Article 31 addresses the settled and binding character of decisions made by the broader assemblies of the church. It was Ophoff’s contention that the Mission Committee and First PRC were militating against the settled and binding decisions of the previous two synods, in

particular Article 83 of the 1947 *Acts of Synod*, which reads, “The synod further decides in regard to Mission work that the calling church call two missionaries to labor together in the work of home missions.”

The matter brought up by Ophoff at the conclusion of his protest would later become a matter of major doctrinal debate on every level in the churches. It is clear from the protest that this is what truly lay heavy on the brother’s heart. We quote several paragraphs:

It is a mistaken idea [that our churches have an exceptional opportunity in Canada] in the point of view of the doctrine of these people. Like the people in the Christian Reformed Church here in America, they have a double-track theology. Hence, they have no more in common with us in the point of view of doctrine than the members of the Christian Reformed Church here. They too have the doctrine of the three points [of common grace] though not, of course, in the form of the words of these three points. Also, through their theology runs two lines—the Arminian/Modernist line and the Reformed line. Their heretical line of thought is set forth in the following two propositions.

1. The reprobated in the covenant as well as the elect objectively possess Christ and all things with Him. They too have the legal right to this spiritual good. This right is given them of God in the promise and is sealed unto them, the reprobated, by baptism.
2. The promise of the gospel is always conditional—if you believe, you will be saved. This conditional promise comes to all, elect and reprobated. The Scriptures do not contain an unconditional positive promise to the elect only.

This is a terrible heresy, brethren. The undersigned would like to set it forth in all its horrible implications. But for this there is not time. This horrible doctrine the leaders in the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands openly teach and defend in printed published pamphlets. I say the leaders, and this includes Dr. Schilder. It is the very doctrine he expounded on our meetings with him. But he did so in a kind of veiled speech so that we didn’t know what he was driving at.

Verily, brethren, in a doctrinal point of view, we have no more in common with the immigrants from the Liberated Churches than we do with the membership in the Christian Reformed Church here. In their present state, with the above cited heresies dwelling in their heart as embraced and believed by them, the minds and hearts of these immigrants are as closed to what we believe to be the true gospel of the Scriptures as the minds and hearts of the membership in the Christian Reformed Church here....²

1 Mission Committee minutes of June 28, 1948.

2 Protest written to the Mission Committee and First PRC consistory on August 9, 1948. The entire protest of Ophoff is found on pages 24-36 of the *Acts of Synod*, 1949.

Subsequent history reveals that Ophoff was suspicious of the PRC's dealings with Schilder and the members of the Liberated Churches that immigrated to Canada. Already at this stage he balked at working among them. He felt to do so would eventually lead to a compromise with the conditional theology these immigrants held so dear.

But the Mission Committee as a whole and the men of the Consistory of First PRC were not so convinced. Their answer to Ophoff's protest reveals that First PRC Consistory believed it was not violating Articles 31 and 84 of the Church Order but was indeed making proper provisions for carrying out "the missionary endeavor in Canada," as the Synod of 1948 instructed them. Regarding Ophoff's concern that working among members of the Liberated Churches would be a useless endeavor since there would be no convincing them of the truth of an unconditional covenant, it was felt that this argument was irrelevant to the matter of sending two missionaries.

Ophoff did not agree with the response of First PRC Consistory to him. Having reached an impasse, he appealed to Classis East of October 6, 1948 to uphold his protest against his Consistory regarding splitting the labors of the missionaries between two fields of labor. Classis East of October sustained his appeal. But, the matter still was not finished. At the meeting of Classis East April 6, 1949 the Consistory of First PRC protested the October decision of classis and asked that its protest be sent to Synod of 1949 for adjudication. Classis East drafted a letter defending its position to sustain Ophoff's appeal, which letter was then sent to the coming synod along with all the supporting material for the case. In the meantime, from October of 1948 to the meeting of the synod in June 1949 the two missionaries labored together intermittently in Lynden, WA in compliance with the settled and binding decisions of the broader assemblies.

An underlying doctrinal disagreement was developing among the ministers of the PRC. This became evident in the lengthy deliberation that took place on the floor of Synod 1949 over the matter of where our two missionaries should labor. Some of the clergy were thoroughly convicted of the truth of the unconditional covenant. Others were of a mind that this was only one view of the covenant that did not preclude Schilder's view of a conditional covenant. Over the next couple of years these ministers would cast in their lot with Schilder, publicly preaching and teaching a conditional covenant. It is difficult to determine how many of these ministers may already have embraced this error at the time of the 1949 Synod. But it *can* be said from deci-

sions that were made that they were sympathetic with the view of the Liberated Churches.

Synod 1949 sustained the protest of Ophoff and the decision of Classis East. Article 17 of the 1949 *Acts* adopted the advice of their committee of pre-advice: "to express agreement with the decision of Classis East sustaining the protest of Rev. Ophoff on the ground of transgressing the Church Order overruling Article 33 of the Acts of Synod 1948." The two missionaries would labor together in the same place. But, synod was not finished with the protest of Ophoff until it made a second decision: "that the synod refuse to assume responsibility for" the section of Ophoff's appeal that dealt with the doctrinal error of the conditional covenant maintained by the Liberated immigrants in Canada. One ground was given. "That although we do not express our opinion as a Synod upon the truth or untruth of this part of Rev. Ophoff's allegation, we believe that the matter is irrelevant to the case."

This motion passed, in part, because it was true. Even those who might have wanted to debate the doctrinal issue had to admit that it had little to do with two missionaries working together in the same field of labor. However, another unexpressed reason this motion passed was that there were some who simply did not want to make a stand against the conditional covenant. They would rather avoid the issue altogether. The doctrinal divide was developing.

The synodical decisions of 1949 did not contradict the instruction given the Mission Committee and First PRC by the 1948 Synod to continue to develop a mission work in Canada. Though the missionaries now labored together as a pair in Lynden, WA, the Mission Committee and First PRC became enamored with the labors in Canada. The rest of the year of 1949 and the beginning of 1950 reveals a flurry of activity among the Dutch immigrants in Canada. So much so that the two English-speaking missionaries, E. Knott and W. Hofman found themselves without work. By the time Synod of 1950 rolled around, Knott had taken a call to Kalamazoo PRC and Hofman was considering a call from Randolph PRC. The minutes of the Mission Committee reveal no division or strife among its members during these months of labor. In fact, they exude a general spirit of excitement and anticipation on the rapidly developing work in Canada. Yet, we know from other events going on in the PRC that the canker of false doctrine had entered the body of the church and was soon to destroy the mission work of the churches. We will attempt to record these events as clearly as possible in our next article.



Strength of youth

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

Lessons from the judges (3) Jephthah's vow

The last judge we met in our series was Gideon. Jephthah was one of the judges that came after Gideon. Israel had apostatized—again. Faithful Jehovah, in chastisement, sold them into the hand of enemies, one of which was Ammon. Jehovah raised up Jephthah as judge to fight against the Ammonites. Jephthah was a Gileadite, the son of Gilead, and born of a harlot. Please read the first part of Judges 11 for context. Our concern is the vow that Jephthah made before going to war against Ammon—the latter half of Judges 11.

Serious

This vow of Jephthah was serious. Before we consider the serious vow itself, let's understand the occasion and motive for Jephthah's making the vow.

The occasion for Jephthah making his vow was war against Ammon. Jephthah had been in talks with the king of Ammon (Judg. 11). The Ammonite king was hardened and would not listen to the words of Jephthah. Now it was time for war. Before the war, Jephthah made a vow to God: "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judg. 11:30, 31).

This occasion helps us understand Jephthah's motive for this vow. The vow is not Jephthah's attempt at bargaining with God, as if to say, "Lord, I promise you something if you do something for me." Rather, the vow is a matter of gratitude to God. Jephthah was thankful that he had a place among God's people, even a leading place, and that he would be the instrument in Jehovah's hand to deliver Israel. Jephthah was also grateful that Jehovah would be his strength in war, and that Jehovah would graciously deliver the Ammonites into his hand. In thankfulness to God, he makes this pre-war vow.

Jephthah made a *vow*: "And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD..." (Judg. 11:30). A vow is a promise to do something, a promise uttered before the face of the

all-knowing, holy, and almighty God. The content of the vow was, "whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judg. 11:31). Let's divide that into two parts.

First, the vow was that "*whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me*, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judg. 11:31). The question is, What would come out of the house to meet Jephthah and be offered up for a burnt offering? Some argue that Jephthah rashly made his vow: either he gave no consideration to what would exit his house, or he thought it might be an animal. But this interpretation is wrong.¹ Jephthah anticipated a *human being*, quite possibly his own daughter, to come out of the door to greet him when he returned from war. A *human being* lives in and comes out of a house. Only a *human being* could intelligently celebrate victory with Jephthah after he returns from war. Far from being rash, Jephthah vowed carefully.

Second, the vow was that "whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, *shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering*" (Judg. 11:31). The question now is, What did Jephthah have in mind when he said that whoever comes out of his house shall surely be the LORD's, and that he would offer it up for a burnt offering? Some say that Jephthah intended, and later carried out, human sacrifice. This, too, is a wrong view. By "burnt offering" is not meant human sacrifice. Besides, for the godly Jephthah to sacrifice a human is unthinkable. Instead, the judge purposed that whoever came to meet him (he's likely thinking of his daughter) would be *devoted to Jehovah*; this is what it means to "be the LORD's" and to be "offer[ed]...up for a

¹ Giving all the reasons why this view must be rejected is outside the scope of this article. For those interested in knowing the wrong views and the refutation of them, I am sure your pastor would be happy to direct you to helpful resources on the subject.

burnt offering” (Judg. 11:31). It was, in fact, Jephthah’s daughter who left the house to meet her father when he returned from battle—she would be offered up for a burnt offering in the sense of being *dedicated to Jehovah in a life of virginity* (Judg. 11:38, 39).

This was a serious vow! When his daughter came out to meet him, Jephthah said, “I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back” (Judg. 11:35). He vowed, and he *could not* go back on what he said. The daughter agreed: “My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth...” (Judg. 11:36). Consider that the vow was made to Jehovah—the almighty God, the God of truth, He who is holy and righteous; and, to go back on the promise would be dishonoring the name of God by which he had sworn. A weighty matter!

Young people, we also make vows. Our vows are serious. We need to hear this: today words mean nothing, promises are empty, and vows are rash. How opposite is the teaching of the passage before us!

Consider two vows commonly made in the church. One day, young man or woman, you will stand before the congregation and make public confession of your faith. Perhaps you have already. One of the questions asks, “Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life?” To this question and two others, you say “yes.” That is a vow. That “yes” is one of the weightiest words you will ever utter. Say, with Jephthah, “I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.”

If the Lord wills, you will stand on your wedding day hands clasped to the one you love, and you will say “I do” to something like the following: that you take your wedded husband/wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do you part, according to God’s holy ordinance; and thereto do you pledge yourself with all your heart. A vow! “I do”: two words spoken with trembling, said

before the face of the almighty, holy, righteous God of truth.

Serious!

Costly

Jephthah’s vow was also costly.

We see the costliness of the vow in the sorrow of Jephthah and his daughter. Jephthah’s daughter, joyful about Jehovah’s victory over Ammon, met her returning father. Upon seeing her, Jephthah sorrowed. This does not mean he vowed thoughtlessly and was dismayed to see his *daughter* coming toward him. Instead, this is the grief of a man who knew all along that his daughter would come out, but was overwhelmed now that it *actually happened*. The daughter also mourned. She asked that she be alone with her female companions for a while to mourn over what the vow of her father would require of her: lifelong virginity. This, the lamentation of a man and a woman who knew the costliness of vow-keeping.

The high cost of Jephthah’s promise is evident, too, in what keeping the vow would mean. Jephthah would not have the joy of seeing his daughter married and bearing children. More deeply, this daughter was his only child—no marriage and children for her meant that Jephthah’s name and place would not continue in Israel. From the daughter’s viewpoint, she would never have a husband, never have any children...but would probably watch her companions around her married off and having children. She, too, would lose her name in Israel.

How the costliness of keeping our vows needs to be heard these days! When self-sacrifice is required in faithfulness to our promises, suddenly those promises are not so important anymore. As soon as living according to a vow means inconvenience, hardship, and strain, the vow is tossed aside. A young man makes the vow at confession of faith to be resolved by God’s grace to lead a godly life. But two years after confession of faith, he meets a girl at work—an unbeliever. She refuses to attend church, and he follows her down that road. The elders knock, but he does not answer. He soon requests his papers and moves into his girlfriend’s house. The vow—meaningless to him. An early-twenties woman marries the man of her dreams

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Youth of the church, you must expect that in the keeping of your vows there will be self-sacrifice, pain, and struggle. Being faithful to the promise you made before God’s face will mean exhaustion, self-denial, unpopularity, and ridicule.

and promises to have and hold him in the worst of times. Those worst of times come, just two years in: he loses his job, the finances take a nosedive, and they can't talk anymore without a blow-up argument. One day, he comes home after job-hunting to find a note on the counter: "We're through. I'll be living at my sister's house and starting the legal process for divorce." The vow—trampled upon.

Youth of the church, you must *expect* that in the keeping of your vows there will be self-sacrifice, pain, and struggle. Being faithful to the promise you made before God's face will mean exhaustion, self-denial, unpopularity, and ridicule.

Costly!

Kept

This serious, costly vow Jephthah *kept*, as Judges 11:39 informs us: "And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel...." When she came back from being with her friends, Jephthah performed the vow: the life-long virginity of his daughter.

The strength to carry out what he promised was in Jehovah alone. Of himself, he would have forsaken his

vow. Jephthah, a man strong *in the almighty Jehovah*, kept his vow.

It was a promise Jephthah kept in thankfulness to God. It was thankfulness to Jehovah who so graciously delivered the Ammonites into his hand. It was gratitude to the God who kept *His* promise—the unbreakable, sure promise—and would never go back on it: "And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, *I will never break my covenant with you*" (Judg. 2:1). Jephthah swore and performed his vow, not to do something for God or bargain with Him, but in pure gratitude to Jehovah who was ever faithful to an unfaithful, whorish people.

We, too, must keep our vows. Left to ourselves, we would abandon those vows immediately. We live according to them only by God's grace, and we flee to the cross of our faithful Savior when we do sin against them. In thankfulness we perform what we have sworn—gratitude to the God who was faithful to *His* promise to send the Savior for us. The keeping of that promise was costly: "He that spared not *his own Son*, but delivered him up for us all..." (Rom. 8:32). Good news! Young people, perform what you have vowed—from a heart of thanks to the unchangeably faithful God.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

How many students were enrolled in the PRC seminary in September 1974? Find the answer later in this column. More trivia next time.

Minister activities

Rev. E. Guichelaar (Randolph, WI) declined the call to Kalamazoo, MI PRC. Rev. J. Smidstra (First Holland, MI) received the call from Wingham PRC, declining it on March 21. Byron Center has formed a new trio consisting of Revs. R. Barnhill (Peace PRC), J. Engelsma (Doon PRC), and D. Holstege (missionary to the Philippines). On March 7 they voted to call Rev. Engelsma to be their next pastor.

The Irish government had extended the "Level 5" restrictions until April 5. The McGeowns were not able to have their March 8 appointment; however, the appointment is for a non-immigrant visa, and the embassy's website states that under Level 5 restrictions the U.S. embassy in Dublin will be offering "only extremely limited immigrant visa services" while "non-immigrant visa services will be suspended." Rev. McGeown has another non-immigrant visa interview pending, scheduled for August 11 in London. There is also a very small possibility of an immigrant visa interview being granted to Rev. McGeown before August. Please remember in your prayers Rev. and Larisa McGeown, the remaining

saints of the LRF, as well as the members of Providence PRC who await the coming of their pastor.

Young people's activities

A Young People's breakfast fundraiser was held Saturday, March 20 at the church of 1st PRC in Holland, MI. This was a restaurant-style breakfast with ordering from a menu and service to each table. The fundraiser was conducted by following COVID-19 precautions and by reservation only. Reservations started at 7 A.M. and went every half hour until 10:30 A.M. Take-out service was also provided so supporters could pick-up breakfast and eat at home.

Due to the ongoing pandemic and the restrictions imposed, the YPS Federation Board decided to cancel the Easter Mass Meeting this coming spring. In this, too, we share the disappointment of our young people.

The young people of Pittsburgh, PA PRC hosted a singspiration for their congregation on February 28 after the evening service with an offering taken for the young people's fund.

School activities

From the Federation of PR Christian School Societies: "Recently the *Perspectives in Covenant Education* sent out a special issue to all Protestant Reformed households in North America with one of the goals being to highlight the work of the Federation. We hope that you enjoyed this special issue as you were able to read about the exciting work going on in our schools. If you did not receive this special issue but would like a copy, please contact Kyle Bruinooge, executive director, at kbruinooge@covenantchristianhs.org."

Eastside Christian School was excited to announce a spring Banket Sale. They will have a curbside pickup at Eastside on April 23 from 1-3 P.M. Mmmm...delicious! It's been too long since I've tasted that treat.

From Classis West meeting of March 3-4

On the agenda of Classis West in March was a request from the consistory of Bethel PRC for Classis to concur with its decision to disband, a decision based on her declining membership. With sadness, Classis concurred and extended a word of commendation to the saints in Bethel, and to her present and former officebearers, for the labors so faithfully extended in the spread of the gospel over the past 32 years. Classis also thankfully acknowledged Bethel's continuing heart for and gift to the denomination in her decision to forward her remaining assets to Synod. Bethel plans officially to disband at the end of June 2021.

In light of its decision to disband, Bethel also brought a request for her pastor, Rev. Dennis Lee, to be declared temporarily emeritus effective after the disbanding of the congregation, unless he should receive and accept a call to another congregation in that time. Classis approved the request, and will forward it to Synod 2021 for its approval.

A glance back in time—1974-1975

The convocation program of the seminary in September 1974 showed no less than 15 young men enrolled as students! Three were from outside our denomination.... Classis West in September examined and approved Cand. James Slopsema and advised the consistory of Edgerton, MN to proceed with his ordination, with Rev. R. Moore conducting the service.... Rev. Dale Kuiper accepted the call of Hudsonville PRC to leave Pella, IA PRC and become home missionary. He moved to Skowhegan, Maine to take up his work there.... Rev. C. Hanko observed 45 years in the ministry of God's Word and Rev. G. Lubbers 40 years.... Classis East unanimously approved the examination of Cand. A. denHartog, pastor-elect of Prospect Park, NJ congregation.... Rev. J. Kortering declined calls from Kalamazoo and Pella.... Rev. R. Harbach continued to labor as home missionary in Houston, TX.... In the summer of 1974 the congregation at Doon, IA began to watch their new church building come to reality. The hope was to occupy the structure by the first Sunday in March 1975. That was the day designated by Synod 1974 as the day all our churches should set aside for our fiftieth anniversary as a denomination.... Rev. G. Lubbers accepted the call to Pella, IA.... Prof. H.C. Hoeksema traveled to Forbes, ND PRC to see his first grandson—Stephen Mark, son of Rev. and Mrs. Mark Hoeksema. While he was there, he presented a public lecture with about 50 people filling the small church building. Some traveled 50-60 miles.... "God's Covenant Faithfulness" was the theme of the 35th Young Peoples Convention, which ran concurrently with the 50th anniversary celebration of our churches.... The congregation at Redlands, CA opened their own school in September of 1975 with approximately 30 students in grades 1-9...a school was also in the works in Hull, IA.

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

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Tom and Nancy Buiter in the death of Tom's mother, **Sadie Knoper**. She went to be with her Lord on March 11, 2021. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Rev. D. Noorman, President
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

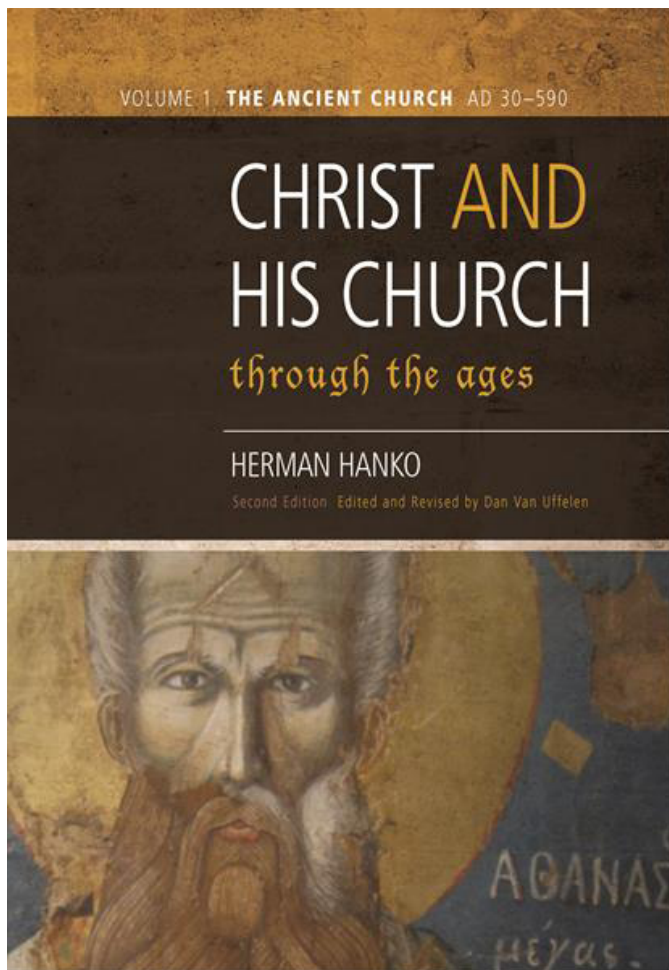
Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 12, 2021 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated 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.



Herman Hanko tells the fascinating story of the ancient church during the first six centuries of the New Testament dispensation. He relates how Christ faithfully guided the church from the ministry of the apostles through the fall of the Roman Empire. Highlights of this history include the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles, the persecution of the church under Roman emperors, the ecumenical councils, and the battle for the truth of sovereign grace.

All readers alike will grow in their love and appreciation for the saga of Christ's church. They will find church history to be "the exciting adventure of the marvelous work of grace."

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