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The happy home of the righteous

Rev. James Slopsema

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Jonah's preaching

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Amusement: The mind's escape from reality

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Meditation

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

The happy home of the righteous

The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.

Proverbs 3:33

The family unit in our society is disintegrating. Marriage, which is the backbone of the family, is in deep trouble. Mothers, who are all important to the welfare of the family, are abandoning their God-given role in the family as keepers of the home to take up work outside the home. Children and young people no longer respect authority but live as rebels in their homes. The lifestyle our society has adopted makes family life very difficult.

These tendencies are not limited to the families of the world but are also creeping more and more into church families. This trend spells disaster for the church and the cause of God's covenant. This is because the Christian home and family are the backbone of the church.

It is well, therefore, that we consider the wisdom of the Lord in this proverb.

The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked. God forbid that we follow the wickedness of the world that only brings God's curse into one's home.

The Lord blesses the habitation of the just. As another year of Christian schooling and catechetical instruction are about to begin, it is important to emphasize that an essential element in the habitation of the just is proper training of the children of God's covenant. Pray for grace to live as the just in Jesus Christ to enjoy the blessing of the Lord in your home.

A contrast is made between the wicked and the just.

The term "just" could perhaps better be translated as "righteous."

The basic idea of "righteous" in the Bible is that of obedience to God's law. The Bible looks at righteousness from both a legal point of view and a moral point of view. Viewed legally, righteousness is God's verdict as our Judge that we are righteous before Him. He sees no sin in us. All that He has required of us in His law has been met perfectly. Viewed morally, righteousness

is obedient living according to the standard of God's holy law.

The righteous described in this proverb are righteous in both senses.

They are not righteous in and of themselves. No one is truly righteous in himself, that is, self-righteous. Fallen mankind is incapable of any good and inclined to all wickedness. This is how God sees and judges fallen mankind. There is none righteous of himself, no not one.

One is righteous only by faith in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus the believer is righteous, first of all, legally. Through Jesus' death on the cross God has provided a perfect righteousness for His elect people. This righteousness consists of complete payment for all their sins and a perfect obedience performed on their behalf. If we will be righteous before God our Judge, God must reckon the perfect righteousness of Christ to be ours. This He does by faith alone. Faith is God's gift to His people that unites them forever to Christ. This faith is also the power that brings them to a godly sorrow for sin, a humble confession of sin, and a clinging to Jesus' perfect work. Through this faith God imputes the perfect righteousness of Christ to all His people so that they know the forgiveness of their sins and are reconciled to God.

In Jesus the believer is also righteous morally. The believer who finds his sins fully covered before God in Christ is profoundly thankful. In thankfulness he desires to serve God according to all His commandments. By faith he finds the strength to do so in Jesus Christ. He is not able to do so perfectly. But in Christ he begins to serve God according to all His commandments.

In contrast to the righteous are the wicked. The term translated "wicked" has the basic idea of agitation, stirring up trouble, causing turmoil. It emphasizes the effect of sin. Sin is that which brings trouble and turmoil, not only to one's own life but to the life of others. This wickedness characterizes all those who are without Jesus Christ. Those who have not been joined to Christ by faith can only live in sin and disobedience to

God's law. This brings trouble and turmoil to all of life. These wicked are found in the world, but sadly also in the church.

This proverb speaks of the *house* of the wicked and the *habitation* of the righteous.

The word translated "house" indicates a living together in a house, suggesting the idea of a family. The word translated "habitation" comes from a word that means to sit and rest. This emphasizes that one's home is a place of rest, comfort, and joy.

The habitation of the just is the home in which the righteous live. The term itself suggests a family consisting of father, mother, and children who know the Lord. This is consistent with how the Lord works His salvation. When a God-fearing couple marry in the Lord, that marriage is ordinarily blessed with elect children. Parents who are living righteously in Jesus Christ are also zealous to train their children in the realities of the covenant. They train their children in their own homes by teaching them the Scriptures and applying them to everyday practical life. An important element of that training is their own godly example. But that covenant training extends outside the home. They bring their children to the house of the Lord on the Sabbath day to worship the Lord. Those who are of Reformed persuasion have also found that the tradition of good Christian schools and a strong catechetical program is invaluable in the spiritual training of covenant children. The Lord uses such training to bring the children of the habitation of the righteous to faith and salvation in Christ. This is the habitation of the just.

In sharp contrast there is the house of the wicked. The house of the wicked consist of father, mother, and children, just as the habitation of the just. In this case, however, it is a family living without Christ. Without Christ such families live only in wickedness. They fill their homes with wicked disregard for God's law. They walk only in disobedience and teach their children so.

In the one home you will find the Lord's blessing. In the other, the Lord's curse.

The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.

The curse of the Lord is the outward manifestation of His wrath against sin. God is very angry with the sin of man. Unless this sin is covered in the blood of Jesus, God vents His terrible wrath upon the sinner. God's curse is the misery and torments God heaps upon the wicked as the proper punishment for their sin.

God's curse comes especially on the wicked in their

home and family life. Certainly, the curse of God and the misery it brings is not limited to the home of the wicked. The curse of the Lord is upon every aspect of his life on earth—his work and play, his business and learning, and finally in hell. But, for this present life, the curse of God is found especially in his home. For the home and family is the center of one's life. It is in the home that we spend most of our time. It is there that we find the most important and closest relationships of life. One's happiness is inseparably connected to the home. What joy when there is peace and unity in the home! What sorrow and grief when the home is troubled! God curses the wicked by touching especially his home.

The misery God brings to the house of the wicked is often the direct result of the wickedness of the family members. Impenitent and unforgiven sin brings God's judgment of failed marriages, abuse, divorce, rebellion, alcoholism, and many other family maladies. And this often arises in the context of earthly prosperity, which many confuse with God's grace. The more God gives to the wicked, the more they have with which to sin and to bring greater sorrow upon themselves.

In contrast, God blesses the habitation of the just.

God's blessing is the manifestation of His love and favor to His people. This manifestation of love and favor causes them to prosper spiritually, filling their hearts with gladness. This blessing comes to them only on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that God has imputed to them by faith. But this blessing is enjoyed only in the way of their righteous living that Jesus works in them. God especially blesses the righteous in their home life. Ordinarily, He blesses their marriages so that there is harmony and unity between husband and wife that reflects the blessed relationship between Christ and His redeemed church. Ordinarily, God also blesses their home with children who come to know the Lord and serve Him with all due obedience to their parents. To this we may add the consolation and hope that the family enjoys in the promises of God as they face the difficulties of life. The righteous also face many hardships in this life. But these hardships are trials that the Lord places upon the righteous to strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ. They are really blessings in disguise.

Because happiness is found only with the righteous, this proverb speaks of the "habitation" of the righteous. The word "habitation" originally referred to a sheepfold where the sheep were safe and secure for the night. From that developed the idea of a place of safety, protection, and rest. The home of the righteous is just such a habitation because of the Lord's blessings on it.

This proverb merely states a truth. A solemn calling is implied.

That calling is to establish and maintain habitations of righteousness. This is a calling for young people to marry in the Lord. It is a calling to newly married couples to live righteously so that Christ is the center of their life together and the new home they have established. It is a calling to covenant parents to train their children in the true righteousness of the covenant. It is a calling to covenant children to embrace the training of their home, church, and school so that they may come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and grow in godliness.

This calling is necessary because the works of salvation are only begun and not finished in us. We develop in righteous living only as we are instructed and called by the Word of the Lord.

And when we live righteously in our homes, we can expect the blessing of the Lord. This is the Lord's promise. But know this also. Should the righteous in weakness of faith allow the wickedness of the world into their home life, they will know the Lord's anger in the form of chastisement and correction. God forbid such folly! Let us by faith make our homes the habitation of the just and enjoy the great blessings of the Lord.



Editorial

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

Schism and the charge of antinomianism

In the past five years, our churches have struggled mightily to combat and root out error that gave to good works a place “out of harmony with the Reformed confessions.” In the process of that struggle, some have warned against antinomianism as an error that must also be avoided. My editorial about the “two thieves” showed that there is always error on both sides of the gospel of the cross, both on the left and on the right. The error of giving *credit* to good works is an error, perhaps referred to as error on the ‘left.’ But there is also an error on the ‘right’ that would have a different and opposite misunderstanding of works. The church has often called this error Antinomianism.

Angry reaction to any reference to antinomianism claims that it distracts from the real issue, misleading people to ignore the main error in the PRCA and focus on one that is not error. In this editorial I want to point out how PRCA members, especially the ministers, have been trained to detect both errors, especially now the error on the ‘right.’ The minister who gave us this training began his ministry, he says (and I paraphrase), “With his gun loaded for Arminian bear, only to find that the congregation’s weakness was not Arminianism....”

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America and the RFPA (Reformed Free Publishing Association) have considered Prof. David Engelsma’s *Hyper-Calvinism*

and the *Call of the Gospel* so important, and the book has had such a world-wide audience, that it has been reprinted three times. First published in 1980 (it had already appeared as *Standard Bearer* articles beginning in 1974), it was reprinted/republished in 1994 and again in 2014. It is not the best-seller in the RFPA’s repertoire, but it is among their top ten and is one of the PRCA’s most important because it explains an essential element of our rejection of common grace. Even the second generation of PRCA preachers, born shortly after 1900 and still preaching in the late 1970s were familiar with it. Any PRCA minister today who is not well versed in its argument would be embarrassed to admit it.

As a preacher in the PRCA for the first 20 years of my ministry and now for 18 years as a professor of preaching in the PRCA, I have been especially interested in the book’s last chapter (chapter 9) because it contains sound advice for preachers about preaching. After all, it is a book about the biblical view of how the gospel ought to be preached: its title is not merely *Hyper-Calvinism*, but *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, and I am tasked by the PRCA to teach men to preach, an essential element of which is to present the call of the gospel. Part of my task involves asking what is the PRCA’s tradition about how to preach and a significant aspect of the answer is “*Not* with an Arminian well-meant offer.” This negative answer is the thrust of Engelsma’s book in the first eight chapters. These chapters are a

skillful defense of the PRCA against the accusation that they are hyper-Calvinists.

At the end of chapter 8 the question remains: “How then *ought* the gospel to be preached? If not by offering Jesus in an Arminian way, how must Jesus be presented?” Chapter 9 addresses this question, warning the PRCA of *another* danger on the side opposite to Arminianism, the danger that PRCA preachers do not do justice to the serious call of the gospel. This is the thrust of chapter nine “The Threat of Hyper-Calvinism.” Other seminary courses will require students to read chapters 1-8. Beginning preaching students are required to read chapter 9.

In sum, the book is a defense of the PRCA against the charge, “Hyper-Calvinists!” And when Prof. Engelsma finishes that defense, he wisely asks, “But is there a danger of Hyper-Calvinism in Reformed churches, even *in the PRCA*?” Prof. Engelsma answers, “Yes.” Then spells his explanation out in a very clear way.

The following description of the main argument in the chapter aims to be a short tutorial on antinomianism. It will also reveal why, amid our recent troubles, PRC ministers have been calling out errors on the right (antinomianism) at the same time that our churches have rejected errors on the left (giving works a place in salvation they cannot have). After reading this you will see why the ‘Reformed antennae’ of our preachers have been detecting some strange sounds of late.¹

Hyper-Calvinism is not the worst danger for Reformed churches (193). Engelsma introduces the chapter by reminding us that the *worst* threat in Reformed circles is Arminianism. That error is so predominant that one might be tempted to invite some hyper-Calvinism into the churches to ‘balance out’ the error of Arminianism. But this would be wrong, for the church does not fight error with error. Reformed churches do not do theology by being reactionary. The Synod of Dordt is a fine example of that: when Arminianism accused Reformed churches in the Netherlands that their doctrine of election destroyed the ability to preach the call of the gospel properly, Dordt did not, in overreaction, deny the seriousness of the gospel call to everyone who hears. Being reactionary will not help the gospel’s cause. But all this is only an introduction to the main point of the chapter.

Hyper-Calvinism is a real threat. “It is the lie on the right that must be guarded against as scrupulously as the lie of self-salvation on the left” (195). Hyper-Calvinism purports to be Calvinism but is an extreme and

therefore a distorted form of Calvinism (“hyper” means “above”). Hyper-Calvinism 1) restricts the preaching to born-again believers, and/or 2) silences the call to repent and believe, and/or 3) loses zeal for missions. After Dordt there have been examples of hyper-Calvinists in Calvinistic-Baptist churches, and this tendency appears also among some in Reformed churches. We are not “ignorant of Satan’s devices” and the appearance of the error must be traced back to him, the father of the lie. If Satan cannot prevent the recovery of the gospel of grace (as Dordt recovered it), he will try to turn grace into license. The devil uses this tactic especially when the church is battling Arminianism. As the church contends against one false doctrine, get her in reaction to succumb to the opposite error. “As she guards the front door, slither in through the back window” (197). Here Augustus Toplady is quoted approvingly: “Christ is still crucified between two thieves, Antinomianism and Pharisaism.” This introduces the reader to the subject of Antinomianism.

Hyper-Calvinism is a descendant of Antinomianism.² Antinomianism is the error of being, in one way or another, against (anti) God’s law (nomos). Antinomians are against God’s law, they claim, because they are *for* the gospel. Since we are saved by grace and not law, it is “treason” to the gospel to command God’s people to obey the law. The law can only teach men their misery. It cannot be a required standard for sanctification. Antinomians, then, are strong on the first two parts of the Heidelberg Catechism (sin and salvation) but weak on the third (thankful living). This is Antinomianism in the *stricter* sense (198)

But there is also Antinomianism in a *broader* sense, and that is the error of Hyper-Calvinism (199). After a four-page digression (199-204), which warns of an incorrect understanding of Hyper-Calvinism), Engelsma returns to the point that Hyper-Calvinism is Antinomianism: It is “...a denial of man’s responsibility [that] has appeared again and again in the Calvinistic camp. Antinomianism’s dirty head has protruded again and again to strike the heel of the gospel of grace. And *hyper-Calvinism is antinomianism* with reference to the preaching of the gospel, especially the imperative [commands] of the gospel, and with reference to the duty of men...” (204, emphasis added). Note well: Hyper-Calvinism is antinomianism.

Hyper-Calvinism itself has a “classic” (original) form and a “developed” form. Hyper-Calvinism’s classic form Engelsma calls “*hardened* hyper-Calvinism” (204). This hardened form denies the duty of the church

¹ In the following short summary of the chapter’s argument, page numbers are from the 1994 edition.

² The analogy of ancestry is mine, not Engelsma’s.

to preach the gospel of salvation to all men and to call all men to believe on Jesus Christ. But Hyper-Calvinism developed, and this development the church must recognize and resist (205). Just as Antinomianism produced Hyper-Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism has brought forth its heirs, still similar in nature but slightly different in appearance. They are not the hardened form of Antinomianism, but manifest the “subtle inroads of the hyper-Calvinistic heresy.”

To guard against these subtle inroads is the urgent task of the Reformed church that has rejected the well-meant offer, that is, of the PRCA. The PRCA must guard against the Antinomianism of Hyper-Calvinism. This is the climax and main purpose of chapter 9.

What are the manifestations of this spirit of Hyper-Calvinism? They are three:

First, **a minimizing of the need to do missions.** Why? Because, well, God has His elect, and He will see to it that they go to heaven (206-208). This concern is real but is not our concern in this editorial.

Second, **Hyper-Calvinistic Antinomianism is fearful and embarrassed to call men to “repent and believe!”** (209). Here is one of the most important parts of the chapter. People are afraid to call men to repentance and faith because they fear that “this goes in the direction of works...” They are afraid of telling men that there is something they must *do*. Such fear may cause the minister to say everything about how wrong the Arminians are, but never issue the “tender and urgent call” of the gospel to come to Jesus. The following lines need to be digested if we will be on guard against Hyper-Calvinistic-Antinomianism:

If the fruit of the preaching of the gospel is that men, pricked in their hearts, cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” or that a Philippian jailor says, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” it is not in place, it is not typically Reformed, to launch into a fierce polemic against free will or to give a nervous admonition against supposing that one can do anything towards his own salvation. The answer to such questions, the Reformed answer, is “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...,” and “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved....”

Third, **Hyper-Calvinism’s spirit resists preaching the admonitions of Scriptures.** This happens when Hyper-Calvinism’s spirit has developed somewhat. The Hyper-Calvinistic spirit says, “Good gospel preachers should not tell people what to do,” likely because Christians will work automatically in response to the gospel. This spirit does not like admonitions, especially when

they are preached “with the sharpness, urgency, boldness, and freedom that obtain in the Scripture.” Where there is resistance to preaching the warnings of the gospel there is Hyper-Calvinistic Antinomianism. “From this stage, it is but a little way to the disorder and license of open antinomianism: ‘Let us sin that grace may abound’” (210).

Engelsma’s chapter ends with a *lengthy* quotation from Luther. Buy the book, and read Luther, who “can be our teacher here” (210).

Conclusions

What must we learn from this?

First, Reformed Christians must learn what Antinomianism is in all its developed forms and be bold to call it what it is: Antinomianism. Even though it may have ‘morphed’ into a shape that does not look like it did two or four centuries ago, it is still Antinomianism and we must not be afraid to say so. At Synod 2017 I spoke with some vehemence comparing Antinomianism to a virus that changes form to adapt to circumstances and avoid assaults against it. The vaccine for a virus that might have worked in years past will not work today since mutations in the virus now allow it to exploit and damage its host in different ways. Similarly, since Antinomianism first appeared, it has adapted and modified itself. Pelagianism, a different error, did the same. Soon after Augustine condemned Pelagianism, it transformed itself. The church called it semi-Pelagianism. Pelagianism had disguised itself. And then semi-Pelagianism mutated and appeared as an even greater threat to the church after the Reformation through a man we all know as Arminius. Thus, when the great Synod of Dordt condemned Arminianism, it was not afraid to call it Pelagianism resurrected out of hell (Head II.B.3). In whatever disguise Antinomianism appears today, we should recognize it as a descendant of the old Antinomianism itself. “Antinomianism Original,” “The New Antinomianism,” “Hyper-Calvinism Hardened” or “Hyper-Calvinism Modified,” are all Antinomianism. Freely debate about the best word for any particular strain. But call them all error.

Second, since there are different forms of Antinomianism and different aspects of its error, we should not be surprised if a person does not appear to be Antinomian in one respect but is guilty of it in a different respect. I may be a *practical* Antinomian even though I am *doctrinally* sound regarding Antinomianism. I am still Antinomian. On the other hand, I may love God’s law and live according to it, and in that respect am not Antinomian; but if I have a very wrong view of the use of God’s law in the preaching, I may still be grossly Antinomian.

Third, PRC ministers have been recognizing forms

of Antinomianism among us for quite some time, and more in recent years. In a paper widely publicized with his permission, one of our ministers spoke of a “gross antinomianism,” a “practical antinomianism” and the “spirit of antinomianism” in some of those who have left us. Another minister’s letter identifies a form of Hyper-Calvinism in the schismatics. I have been preaching in the PRCA long enough to have heard a wide variety of reactions to preaching including reactions I judge to be Hyper-Calvinistic and Antinomian. When I preached some time ago on the sin of breaking God’s covenant (see Leviticus 26, Psalter 78:11) and identified that reality as a ‘violation’ of God’s covenant and not a ‘severing’ of the relationship, one man nevertheless angrily responded, “We cannot break God’s covenant!” He did not want to hear warnings about the believer’s sin against God’s covenant. Recently, when I preached Paul’s wonderful confession of grace from I Corinthians 15:10, one man commended me, “There, that’s what we need to hear. Let’s

stop talking about works.” Stop talking about works? That is hyper-Calvinistic-Antinomianism. It is what Luther warned against and what Engelsma said is a wrong resistance to the preaching of admonitions.

Fourth, therefore, although a charge of Antinomianism *can* be a red-herring—a play designed to draw attention away from the *real* error—it may be fatally wrong to identify *every* charge of Antinomianism as a red herring. Why, what Antinomian would ever admit to being an Antinomian? And what better defense, for an Antinomian, than to cry foul? Of course there is an angry reaction. But the angry reaction itself may well be an attempt to distract attention from genuine Antinomianism.

Finally, and again, let us always resist over-reaction to error. An error that undermines *grace* by giving an improper place to works must not allow us to ignore the call to work. And an error that undermines *works* must not allow us to ignore the necessity of grace.

Correction

In the letter of Mr. Doug Wassink in the August *SB*, we mistakenly changed a sentence in his next-to-last paragraph. The corrected sentence should read, “But we do have one example—Christ, in perfect love, gave

up all His personal benefits (even spiritual ones) for us on the cross” (We had “...gave *us* all His personal benefits....”). We apologize for this error and any change of sense it gave to the author’s meaning.



All around us

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

Assemblies facing the issue of homosexuality

Plagiarism in the pulpit

In the summer of 2020, many, if not most, North American denominations of churches were forced to cancel their general assemblies, synods, and conventions. By the time the summer of 2021 arrived, the restrictions in many states allowed for these larger assemblies to convene and take up their annual work once again.

Growing anticipation for CRC’s next synod

One denomination that did not convene a synod this summer is the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). The CRC’s “Council of Delegates” convened virtually in June to take up some of the work

on synod’s agenda. The Council is the denomination’s governing board, consisting of one delegate from each of the 49 classes in the CRC, plus five at large delegates.¹ Interested readers can find a report from *The Banner* that highlights a few of the items from synod’s agenda that were addressed by the Council, and a few that were not.²

1 www.crcna.org/welcome/governance/council-delegates.

2 Gayla R. Postma, “Not a Real Synod: Council of Delegates Meets in Special Session,” *The Banner*, June 17, 2021, www.thebanner.org/news/2021/06/not-a-real-synod-council-of-delegates-meets-in-special-session.

The Banner anticipates Synod 2022 as “a defining moment for the relationship between the Christian Reformed Church and its members who identify as LGBTQ.”³ A special committee’s report on human sexuality and overtures pertaining to that report will surely be at the crux of such a moment. The report’s length (175 pages) and expansive scope preclude any exhaustive commentary in this space, but the full report⁴ and the committee’s summary⁵ are available at the links below.

There are, however, two aspects of the report that caught my attention.

First, the report affirms the CRC’s 1973 report on homosexuality, which the committee quotes, “We must distinguish between the person who is homosexual in [their] sexual orientation and the person who engages in explicit sexual acts with persons of the same sex.”⁶ They explain in their own words that “there is no sin in being attracted to the same sex.” It is sad, but not surprising, that this long-standing deviation from the biblical doctrine of human sexuality is not overturned or called into question.

Second, there are some commendable aspects of the committee’s report. One of them is the committee’s firm conclusion that “the church’s teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status.”⁷ Aside from the aforementioned weakness (affirming the report of 1973), the committee is bold in its conclusion that the Bible and Confessions condemn all sexual immorality as sin. The committee’s final sentence is powerful: “To refuse to uphold Christian teaching on sexual immorality would signal that the Christian Reformed Church in North America is deviating not only from Scripture but from the shared confession of the historic and worldwide church.” My personal observation is that this conclusion of the report seems to be the most controversial and divisive aspect of it; we shall see how Synod receives it next summer, D.V.

PCA 2021 General Assembly

If this discussion concerning special committee reports and human sexuality sounds familiar, that is because it is an issue (and an approach) that is plaguing more than

just the CRC. The PCA had its own committee and its own report on human sexuality. In contrast to the CRC, the PCA’s committee report does affirm the biblical truth that homosexual attraction, not just activity, is sin. The General Assembly (GA) voted to commend the report, and approved overtures that harmonized with it.

These actions have been largely hailed as a victory for conservatives. Jon Payne (who wrote about these issues in advance of the GA) responded positively to the GA’s decisions. Payne calls the GA’s decisions a “clear message” that “the PCA doesn’t want a bigger tent,” (that is, making room for Side B Gay Christianity⁸), while also acknowledging “there is still much work to be done in these and other areas.”⁹ Carl Trueman offered his “outside perspective” (as a member of the OPC), calling the result “encouraging and surprising.”¹⁰

On the other hand, Larry Ball, a retired minister in the PCA gave his take “as a teaching elder who sits in almost every presbytery meeting of one of the most conservative presbyteries in the PCA.”¹¹ Ball recognizes reason for optimism, but also expresses concerns that the matter of “Side B Homosexuality” is not decisively put to rest by the actions of the GA. Ball writes, “As far as I know, not one Side B Homosexual who holds office in the PCA plans to resign from his position. I would suggest that if the changes are ultimately adopted, none will resign. And don’t expect any disciplinary action.”¹² He adds a little later, “In my opinion, there are enough loopholes in the proposed changes to continue to allow Side B Homosexuals to continue as officers in the PCA (or be admitted to the PCA).”¹³ Although some of Ball’s reasons for concern are more or less speculative, his fears are at least a warning against undercutting what the GA accomplished this summer.

8 To the best of my knowledge, “Side B” does not seem to have precise, standard definition, but it is basically a term for those who identify as gay or homosexual Christians, but do not approve or practice homosexual actions. I second Payne’s suggestion of Rosario Butterfield’s article for one explanation: <https://rosariobutterfield.com/new-blog/2018/2/14/what-is-wrong-with-gay-christianity-what-is-side-a-and-side-b-anyway>.

9 Jon Payne, “The PCA’s Bright Future—Without a Bigger Tent,” *Gospel Reformation Network*, July 9, 2021, <https://gospelreformation.net/the-pcas-bright-future-without-a-bigger-tent>.

10 Carl R. Trueman, “At the PCA General Assembly, The Little Guys Stood Up,” *First Things*, July 8, 2021, www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/07/at-the-pca-general-assembly-the-little-guys-stood-up.

11 Larry Ball, “Did the Little Guy Really Win?—The 48th PCA General Assembly,” *The Aquila Report*, July 14, 2021, www.theaquilareport.com/did-the-little-guy-really-win-the-48th-pca-general-assembly/.

12 Ball.

13 Ball.

3 Postma, “Not a Real Synod.”

4 www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/human_sexuality_report_2021.pdf.

5 www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/summary_human_sexuality_report_2020.pdf.

6 CRC Human Sexuality Report, 2020.

7 CRC Human Sexuality Report, 2020.

The PCA's actions are most definitely a step in the right direction on the issue of homosexuality, but at the same time, anything less would have been greatly discouraging. Approval from presbyteries and a final approval from next year's GA are required to finalize some of the GA's decisions, so the work will continue and, likely, the controversy will continue with it.

SBC: Plagiarism in the pulpit

As I monitored the news from various North American denominations, the issue of homosexuality (along with COVID-19) dominated many of the headlines. Unfortunately, the only thing that seems capable of breaking up the commentary on one controversy is a new controversy or scandal. The new story was one of plagiarism in the pulpit that took place in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). I take no pleasure in addressing it, but it may be profitable for the purpose of learning from it.

As *Religion News Service* reports, the scandal involves the newly-elected president of the SBC, Ed Litton, and the outgoing president of the SBC, J.D. Greear.¹⁴ When Litton preached from the book of Romans early this summer, his sermons gained a large amount of attention likely because of his new position in the SBC and the sermon's teaching on homosexuality. Soon it was discovered that Litton's sermon had striking similarities to sermons preached by Greear a year earlier. In some instances, Litton's sermons match Greear's almost word-for-word, and no credit is given. After news broke, both Litton and Greear addressed the controversy.¹⁵ Apparently, Litton had sought and was granted permission from Greear to borrow from his sermons in advance of preaching them, but the error was his failure to give credit. Litton apologized for this, and Greear handled it graciously.

Although the matter seems resolved between the two ministers, the scandal had already taken hold on a national scale. Soon more instances of plagiarism were discovered, and the story was addressed in *Newsweek* and even *The New York Times*. The result of this scandal is not only the damaged reputation of a preacher,

but an occasion for the world to blaspheme the God of preaching. We do well to learn from it.

One lesson to take from all this is obvious: If a preacher uses another man's work, then he must cite his source. Plagiarism is sin. It is the theft of a neighbor's words or work by passing it off as one's own. Most often, plagiarism takes place in written form, even though it can be avoided with a simple citation. Plagiarism in the context of preaching is also sin, and on account of preaching's spiritual and sacred character, it is even more serious.

Reformed preachers ought to be avid readers of theologians in our tradition and acquainted with the work of our own peers, and there are many reasons why this is wise and profitable. But, on the rare occasion that a preacher takes another man's work to his own pulpit (perhaps by using another's distinctive phrase, quotation, or idea), there must at least be an acknowledgment that the work is not his own. Usually a simple, general reference to a pastor, a theologian, or commentator is sufficient to maintain a basic standard of transparency and honesty in the pulpit. Most church members will appreciate preaching that is not saturated with citations and interested hearers can still inquire further into references made in the preaching.

There is a more important admonition that arises out of this case of plagiarism. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15). A man who does his own work in the Spirit need not be ashamed of the work he has done before God (much less before his congregation), and he will be kept from the temptation to steal the work of other men.

Faithful preaching never depends upon the words and opinions of men for its credibility, for its authority, and certainly not for its saving power. The beauty of faithful preaching is that when a minister does his own work faithfully, believers will receive it "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13). God-ordained preachers are richly equipped and solemnly called to do this work, and congregations will gratefully receive the fruits of these labors, even as they are proclaimed with simplicity.

14 Bob Smietana, "New SBC President Ed Litton apologizes for using JD Greear sermon quotes without credit," *Religion News Service*, June 26, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/06/26/new-sbc-president-ed-litton-apologizes-for-using-j-d-greear-sermon-quotes-without-credit-god-whisper-homosexuality-sin-romans>.

15 Both Litton and Greear's statements are available online. Litton's Statement: <https://jd/goredemption.com/pastors-statement/> and Greear's Statement: <https://greear.com/a-statement-about-my-sermon-on-romans-1>.



Search the Scriptures

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

Jonah's preaching

And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Jonah 2:10-3:4

The gracious miracle of Jonah's salvation continues with his being vomited out somewhere on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea or the Black Sea by the fish that swallowed him. The fish, specially prepared by God to chastise His disobedient prophet, is now miraculously used by God to set Jonah once again on the way to Nineveh and in the way of obedience to God. The whole story of Jonah and the fish is the story of a miracle. The great miracle, however, is the miracle of Jonah's repentance and conversion. As so, miraculously and graciously brought to repentance, Jonah sets out for Nineveh.

The miracle of the fish and the miracle of Jonah's repentance are important. They point ahead to the greater miracle of Christ's coming and work. Jonah, as we have seen, cannot be a type of Christ. He is not identified as a type in Scripture, but the miracle or sign of his deliverance does foreshadow our deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. That is what Christ means when He compares Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish to His own three days in the belly of the earth. The one miracle points ahead to the other and greater miracle.

The miracle of Jonah's deliverance also becomes part of his preaching in Nineveh whether he intended it to be so or not. He not only preached to them but was a sign to them and it was that sign, as much as Jonah's actual preaching, that God used for the salvation of the Ninevites. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Jo-

nah himself, as much as the words which came from his mouth, was the sermon he preached in Nineveh.

That Jonah was a sign is stated in Matthew 12:39 and Matthew 16:4 (cf. also Luke 11:29). That he was a sign to the Ninevites we know from Luke 11:30: "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." It was that sign, added to Jonah's preaching of repentance, that saved the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching, therefore, included both the call of the gospel to repentance and the good news of the gospel, the promise that whoever repents and believes will be saved.

We should not be surprised that the gospel was preached in that way in Nineveh. God, in the Old Testament, not only sent His Word through His prophets, but very often made them living examples of the Word they brought. Hosea, commanded to marry a whorish woman, was a living sermon to Israel in the days of Jeroboam II, the same king in whose days Jonah prophesied (Hos. 1:2-11). Ezekiel, lying on his side in front of an iron pan for fourteen months, was a sign and sermon to Judah in the last days of that kingdom (Ezek. 4:1-8). The Heidelberg Catechism reminds us in Lord's Day 6 that God gave His Word in many different ways in the Old Testament. So it was in the days of Jonah.

There are those who speculate about Jonah's appearance after being in the belly of a fish for three days. Some say he was bleached white by the stomach acids of the fish. Others speak of the sad state of his clothes and his smell. This was a miracle and the Word of God does not tell us what it was like in the belly of the fish or anything of Jonah's condition after those three days. It was not his appearance but what happened to him, first under the anger of Jehovah, and then in his repentance, that were a sign to the Ninevites of God's justice and of His mercy. How the Ninevites learned his story is beside the point, but it was the sign as well as the threat of destruction that brought them to their knees.

Perhaps the sign was more effective than an actual recitation of the promises would have been, for the Ninevites would hardly have understood a passage like Isaiah 53, had it been preached to them. Many in Is-

rael, who knew of the promised Messiah, did not understand how the Messiah could be like a root out of a dry ground or like a sheep led to the slaughter. But the Ninevites would have understood from Jonah's story that the God whom he served was different from their idols, the God of heaven and earth and sea. They would have understood Jonah's disobedience and would have learned from his story that the God of Israel was able to punish and did punish sin. They would have listened fearfully, therefore, when that man who had suffered such awful punishment preached to them the necessity of repentance. They would have realized, too, from Jonah's story, that the God of Israel, unlike the gods they served, was a God not only just but merciful, a God able and willing to save. They would even have realized that there was in God's sight no difference between Jonah, the Israelite, and themselves. Though not yet written, Jonah was an illustration to them of what Paul would write in Romans 3:9-11: "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." They would have seen what Jonah confessed in the fish's belly, that because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), salvation must be and is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). Thus was the gospel preached in Nineveh and thus was Nineveh saved.

The Ninevites knew, as all men do, God's power and divinity from the things that are made (Rom. 1:18-20), the creation itself, that "most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith, Romans 1:20." But that was only "sufficient to convince [them], and leave them without excuse." They needed the gospel and the Word of God "through which God makes Himself more clearly and fully known...as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation" (Belgic Confession, Art. 2).

Where the fish deposited Jonah we do not know. Nor do we know what happened to the fish thereafter. We do not even know how long it took Jonah to reach Nineveh. The sign is what matters and all the other details are of no account. Jonah, vomited back onto the dry land by the fish, sorry for his disobedience, had no option but to go to Nineveh and preach and be a sign there, used by God for Nineveh's salvation. Thus the Lord often deals with us, leaving us with no other way than the way of repentance and renewed obedience. That Jonah was not entirely cured of his sin is evident in his later attitude, but he is no different from any one of

us in that respect, and so, still a sinner but back in the way of obedience, he finally arrived at Nineveh.

The Bible tells us it was a three-day journey through Nineveh. At one time the Bible's account of Nineveh's size was mocked by scholars who thought they knew better and insisted that no ancient city was that large. Since then archaeological excavations have shown that Nineveh was indeed a great city, the greatest city of the ancient world, though anyone who believes the inspiration of the Bible would never have doubted the Bible's description of Nineveh's greatness.

There Jonah preached, adhering strictly to his commission (Jonah 1:2; 3:2). That this was not entirely a matter of obedience was evident from his later attitude: Jonah would now do what God commanded but without any sympathy for Nineveh, hoping that God would indeed destroy this capital city of Israel's chief enemy, Assyria. He could not help, however, being a sign, and thus served in spite of himself the salvation of Nineveh. Grudgingly he preached and grudgingly he witnessed the repentance of Nineveh, but the power of the gospel is not in those who bring it, nor in their attitude and oratory. The gospel is "the power of *God* unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). It is that because Christ speaks through the Word with the power of Almighty God.

It is the power of that Word that sends Jonah to Nineveh, for we read that the Word of the Lord came to him a second time, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Even in this matter of Jonah's commission, God's Word is irrevocable and accomplishes His purpose. It comes like a hammer to Jonah, continuing the work of bringing this disobedient child of God to the way of obedience (Jer. 23:29). There is mercy in God's dealings with Jonah but a mercy that is severe and just.

So it is always. God allows no excuses, does not allow even our sins and failures to come between us and our calling. Husband, wife, parent, child, or church member, we are required to fulfill our calling no matter what happens and the Word of God will come to us repeatedly until we do. For that reason and as a lesson to us, the Word of God to Jonah is really the same as before: "Go to Nineveh and preach there."

If there is any difference in this second call of Jonah, it is in a hint of God's intention to bring Nineveh to repentance and save the city. The first time He had emphasized Nineveh's wickedness and told Jonah to cry against it. Now He tells Jonah to preach there using a word not often used in the Old Testament, but a word that corresponds to the New Testament words for the preaching of the gospel (cf. Is. 61:1). In effect, by that

word He already answers Jonah's objections to the sparing of Nineveh and says to him, "I am God. I will do as I please, and in doing so will use you, whether you like My ways or not."

There is a lesson in what God says to Jonah about the preaching of the Word. Not only is the Word the power of God unto salvation, but when it is brought it must be brought exactly as God has spoken it. God gives Jonah no latitude to add to that Word or detract from it but simply says, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." What a lesson for the church today and for those who preach the gospel! The preaching is replaced by many other things in the church world and the preaching of the Word is considered tedious and unsuited to our times, but it is God's appointed means for the salvation of His people, be they ever so wicked and cruel as the Ninevites. It is that power of God unto salvation when it is carefully preached according to God's own Word in Scripture

Not only that, but that Word of God always comes with a call to repentance and a threat of judgment against those who do not repent. It is not, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," but "repent of your sins and believe in Me or perish." There is no catering to human beliefs and prejudices, no compromise, no attempt to be relevant and to adapt the gospel message to the hearers: just simply the age-old gospel call that God is pleased to use for saving His own, whomever they may be. It was so with Jonah and ought to be so today.

God used Jonah to preach that Word. There is also a lesson in this for preachers that God uses weakest means to accomplish His purpose. The preacher who feels as Paul did, insufficient for the great task of bringing the gospel message, should remember Jonah. So should those who sit under the preaching. Rev. Carl Haak says it well:

To Nineveh, a society that was enamored with human might and human glamour, God sends a man vomited from a fish's belly. And He puts His word in Jonah's mouth (Reformed Witness Hour, No. 3736).

This is what Paul calls in I Corinthians 1:18-25 the foolishness of preaching. God is pleased to use preaching as the principal means of grace and salvation and is

pleased to use men who are seldom among the wise and mighty and noble of this world, but rather from among the weak and base and despised and foolish. Yet His "foolishness" is still wiser than men, and His "weakness" stronger than men, and so, too, all the glory and honor of salvation is His alone. It is, in fact, Jonah's sinfulness and unworthiness that make him a sign of God's saving grace to the Ninevites.

Thus, too, Christ Himself is a sign today (Luke 11:30). Come in the flesh, crucified and slain, but risen again, He is a sign that the weakness of God is stronger than men and His foolishness wiser than men, for no one but God Himself could have devised such a way of salvation and grace. No one but God Himself in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ could have put to nought all the efforts of man to better himself and save himself by crucifixion and resurrection. No one but God in Christ could have confounded all man's "wisdom" in thinking that he is evolving into something better and improving himself. No one but the same God, who humbled Himself and came in the form of a servant through our Lord

Jesus Christ, would have chosen the preaching of the Word as the means of salvation. No one but a God whose grace is sovereign would have eternally loved the Ninevites and sent Jonah to preach the gospel among them for their salvation: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (I Pet. 1:24, 25).

May we, learning from the story of Jonah, have a higher regard for the preaching of the gospel and humbly submit ourselves to it, believing that His Word does not return void (Is. 55:1). May we never forget that though it is preached by weak and sinful men, it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16). May we, vomited out of the belly of hell by God's amazing mercy, continue to give attendance on the preaching of the Word so that when we fall into sin, as Jonah did, we too may be set again on the path of obedience by the power of the Word. And may all glory and praise be to Him, to whom alone belongs the glory both of the means He has appointed and their good fruit (Canons III/IV, Art. 17).

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Believing and confessing

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Of the predestination of God and the election of the saints

(Second Helvetic Confession 10b)

Previous article in this series: July 2021, p. 427.

We Are to Have a Good Hope For All.

And although God knows who are His, and here and there [in Scripture] mention is made of the small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be reprobate. For Paul says to the Philippians, “I thank my God for you all” (now he speaks of the whole church in Philippi), “because of your fellowship in the Gospel, being persuaded that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is also right that I have this opinion of you all” (Phil. 1:3-7).

The Swiss Reformer, Heinrich Bullinger, continues his treatment of the doctrine of predestination with a paragraph entitled, “We Are to Have a Good Hope For All.” This is an important practical aspect of the Reformed doctrine of election and reprobation. And it is a warning about presuming to ourselves the prerogative that belongs exclusively to God, the prerogative of determining who is elect and who is reprobate. There are two equally serious dangers that threaten the Reformed confession of the biblical truth of predestination. On the one hand, there is the error of keeping altogether silent about predestination in the preaching of the church. While it is often granted that there is such a thing as election and possibly even reprobation, these belong to the hidden things of God and we ought not to speak of them. Speaking of them will only have the effect of undermining assurance and stirring up doubt. The danger on the other hand is that people suppose that they are able to determine who is elect and who is reprobate. At the very least, they suppose that they are able to give a reasonable judgment regarding the eternal destiny of certain men and women.

The paragraph warns against both dangers. We may not be silent about predestination, the heart of the gospel and of the church. At the same time, Christians

must be cautioned against presuming to determine the identity of the elect and reprobate. Apart from those few individuals who are identified as reprobate in Scripture, like Esau and Judas Iscariot, we must refrain from passing sentence on any human being. And although believers may be assured in themselves of their election, we must exercise care in identifying others as elect of God. This does not take away from the word of our Lord that “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). Nevertheless, in the end, “The Lord knoweth them that are his” (II Tim. 2:19).

There are two factors that enter into this discussion. The first is that we are called to make the judgment of charity. It is that principle that lies behind this paragraph of the SHC. As Christians, we are always to render the judgment of charity. The judgment of charity does not prevent us from calling someone to repentance who is walking in sin. Certainly not. The judgment of charity does not prevent us from warning the impenitent that unless they repent they are exposed to the judgment of God and eternal damnation. Certainly not. Instead, “we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate.” The judgment of charity prevents us from judging anyone as reprobate or presuming the right to deliver anyone to perdition because in our judgment they are reprobate.

The second factor that enters into this discussion is the organic principle. Bullinger appeals to Paul’s opening words to the Philippians in the epistle that he addressed to them. He might have appealed to any number of the words of introduction in Paul’s epistles. Paul addresses the whole congregation as “beloved of God,” as “saints,” and as “the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle takes this approach not because he believes that every individual member of the congregation at Philippi, or any of the other congregations that he addressed in a similar way, was elect. He knew very well that “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel”

(Rom. 9:6). He knew that there is always a carnal element in the church, as there was in Israel in the Old Testament. He knew that in God's wheat field, there are always tares that are sown. But reprobation does not determine the apostle's approach to the congregation. Fully aware of the presence of the reprobate, he addresses the congregation from the perspective of the positive element in the congregation, the elect of God. His approach was the "organic approach." He approached the church from the perspective of those who form the living principle of the church, those who have been made alive with the new and heavenly life. They are beloved of God—the elect.

Whether Few Are Elect.

And when the Lord was asked whether there were few that should be saved, He does not answer and tell them that few or many should be saved or damned, but rather He exhorts every man to "strive to enter by the narrow door" (Luke 13:24): as if He should say, It is not for you curiously to inquire about these matters, but rather to endeavor that you may enter into heaven by the straight way.

In this paragraph, Bullinger takes up the matter that he had mentioned in the previous paragraph, that "here and there mention is made [in Scripture] of the small number of elect."

Scripture does indicate that relative to the billions who have been born or will yet be brought into the world, there is a small number who are saved. In Luke 13:24, where Jesus exhorts "every man to 'strive to enter by the narrow door,'" He adds: "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." If "many" enter at the wide gate that leads to destruction, Jesus implies that "few" enter the strait gate that leads to life. In the parallel passage, Matthew 7:13 and 14, Jesus expressly says about the strait gate and narrow way that lead to life: "few there be that find it."

In other ways Scripture teaches that relatively few are saved. Scripture speaks frequently of the faithful people of God as a remnant. One such passage is Isaiah 1:9: "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." Scripture speaks of the "remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). In more than one place, Scripture compares the church to Israel. In the Old Testament, Israel was one tiny nation among all the other larger nations of the world.

That few are saved is also the testimony of biblical and world history. In the old dispensation, God suffered the nations to perish in their idolatry and igno-

rance. Salvation was almost exclusively among the Jews. In the New Testament, the vast majority of the human race has perished never having heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That God has chosen to save a few only, leaving the vast majority of mankind in its sin and unbelief, does not take away from the fact that considered by themselves the elect constitute a great host. That also is true. God's promise to Abraham was that He would make his seed as great in number as the stars of the heavens and the sand by the seashore, Genesis 22:17. In Revelation 7:9, John beholds "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb. Considered in themselves, the elect church is vast in number.

Nevertheless, Bullinger correctly warns against "curiously inquir[ing] about these matters." He appropriately calls attention to Jesus' response to the disciples' question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" Jesus' response was not to answer their question directly, but to exhort them: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). The point of Jesus' response, as Bullinger indicates, is that rather than to be concerned with their question, the far more important question is, "Are you striving to enter into the kingdom?" We ought not to worry about anyone else as much as ourselves.

What in This Matter Is to Be Condemned.

Therefore we do not approve of the impious speeches of some who say, "Few are chosen, and since I do not know whether I am among the number of the few, I will enjoy myself." Others say, "If I am predestined and elected by God, nothing can hinder me from salvation, which is already certainly appointed for me, no matter what I do. But if I am in the number of the reprobate, no faith or repentance will help me, since the decree of God cannot be changed. Therefore all doctrines and admonitions are useless." Now the saying of the apostle contradicts these men: "The Lord's servant must be ready to teach, instructing those who oppose him, so that if God should grant that they repent to know the truth, they may recover from the snare of the devil, after being held captive by him to do his will" (II Tim. 2:23-26).

As wicked men wrest the truth of God generally to their destruction, so do they pervert the particular truth of sovereign predestination. At the same time, their perversion of the truth includes a wicked caricature of the truth. As was true in the days of the Reformation, so also in our day, the most frequent caricature of the

truth of predestination is likening it to pagan fatalism. “What will be, will be; everything has been foreordained. We can do nothing for or against what has been determined, so we might as well live as we please.”

Although the term “hyper-Calvinism” was not yet in use and “antinomianism” was not widely used, these are the closely related errors that are addressed in this paragraph of the SHC. These twin errors, the one focusing on the gospel and the other on the law, have ever been a threat to the Reformed faith. The threat may never be minimized and the church may never let down her guard. Bullinger was sensitive to the threat in his day; we ought to be vigilant in our day.

The fundamental error is separating the goal that God has determined from the way and means that He has ordained with a view to attaining the goal. There are two sides to this issue, corresponding to the two aspects of predestination.

With regard to the reprobate, God who has rejected them also withholds from them belief of the truth and repentance unto life. It is never the case that there are those who would believe and repent, but that despite their faith and turning from sin, God damns them eternally. The Synod of Dordt refers to this caricature of the Reformed faith in the “Conclusion” to the Canons of Dordt: “and that, if the reprobate should even perform truly all the works of the saints, their obedience would not in the least contribute to their salvation.” But the truth is that those whom God has reprobated are not given the gifts of faith and repentance. And at the same time, their wickedness is that they reject Christ in

willful unbelief and refuse to turn from their sins. They are reprobated by God, but they are condemned in the way of their own sin.

With regard to the elect, it never happens that they assume the attitude that “if I am predestinated and elected by God, nothing can hinder me from salvation, which is already certainly appointed for me, no matter what I do.” This wicked caricature of the Reformed faith the Canons of Dordt also repudiate in the “Conclusion.” Election does not “render men carnally secure, since they are persuaded by it that nothing can hinder the salvation of the elect, let them live as they please.” Once again, the God who elects men unto salvation also ordains the means and way unto that salvation, which is belief of the truth and holiness of life. An elect child of God, living in the joy and assurance of election, is never going to assume the attitude that he may live as he pleases because he is elect. But the child of God who lives in the knowledge of his election by God will believe the gospel and will bring forth fruits of thankfulness. God Himself sees to that.

One important error of hyper-Calvinism and antinomianism is indicated in this paragraph. It is the contention that admonitions and warnings are useless: “Therefore all doctrines [that is, doctrinal instruction] and admonitions are useless.” Bullinger will take up this error more fully in the next paragraph, entitled: “Admonitions Are Not in Vain Because Salvation Proceeds from Election.” That is where we will begin next time.



God's wondrous works

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

Three persons really, truly, and eternally distinct

What would you say if an adherent of a heathen religion asked you how your God differed from theirs? Besides the obvious, that our God is the true God and theirs is not, what would be some central points to mention?

Last time we considered two points concerning the oneness of God. First, our God is the one and only Creator who called all things into existence. He alone is “the beginning.” Secondly, He alone is “the end.” He is the goal, who governs and directs all things to accomplish His purpose and glorify His name. The apostle

Paul when preaching to the heathen made specific reference to both of these points when he referred to the one true God as the Creator of all who governs and directs all things (Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-28).

Another point to mention has to do with the three-ness of God. Only the true God has fellowship within Himself. He alone has communion in Himself and brings His people into communion with Him.

That there is communion within God means that there really is a distinction of persons in the one God.

In this third article on the Trinity we consider this distinction between the persons.

Distinguished by what each is called

The three persons in God are “really, truly, and eternally distinct” (Belgic Confession, Art. 8). How each person is distinguished from the others is made known by what each person is called.

The first person is called the Father. He is the only one of the three who begets. The Son does not beget; nor does the Holy Spirit. Only the Father does.

The second person is called the Son. He is the only one of the three who is begotten. The Spirit is not begotten. If He were, there would be two Sons. The Spirit, however, is not begotten. Only the Son is.

The third person is called the Spirit. The word translated “Spirit” or “Ghost” could be translated “Breath.” The Holy Spirit is the Breath of God who is breathed forth from both the Father and the Son. Only the Spirit is breathed forth. The Father and the Son are not.

The begetting of the Son and the breathing forth of the Spirit are eternal activities. Although this doctrine “far surpasses all human understanding” (BC, Art. 9), yet there are points that God has made known to us and that we do understand.

We do know, for example, that the Father has never been without the Son. It is incorrect to say that the Father could have chosen not to beget the Son. The begetting of the Son is an eternal activity. It is characteristic of the Father that He begets the Son, and it is characteristic of the Son that He is begotten of the Father.

It is similar with regard to the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic of the Spirit that He is breathed forth from both the Father and the Son. It could not be otherwise.

Admittedly, this is beyond what we can fully grasp. Our God is incomprehensible. Yet we do truly know Him, and are called to confess what God has told us about Himself.

“Incommunicable properties”

We confess that there are three persons in God who are really distinct “according to their incommunicable properties.” This phrase is found in Article 8 of the Belgic Confession, which goes on to explain these properties.

The Father is “the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible.” He who eternally begets the Son is the origin of all things.

The Son is “the word, wisdom, and image of the Father.” When we have seen the Son, we have seen the Father, for the Son is the Father’s image. The Son is also called the Word of God (John 1:1- 3) and the Wisdom

of God (Prov. 8). The One who is the Word, Wisdom and Image of the Father reveals the Father unto us. Jesus referred to this when He said: “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matt. 11:27).

The Holy Spirit is “the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son.” The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was signified by the sound of a rushing, mighty wind. The Spirit of God powerfully accomplishes God’s purpose, quickening every person whom He intends to save.

How this has been made known

How do we know this? How do we know that there are three persons in God who are really distinct from one another?

The first sentence of Article 9 of the Belgic Confession explains: “All this we know, as well from the testimonies of Holy Writ as from their operations, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves.”

The article says we know this from the testimonies of Scripture. It then goes on to quote passages from the Old Testament and the New. From the Old Testament it quotes Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 3:22, both of which refer to a plurality of persons in God. From the New Testament the baptism of Jesus¹ and the command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are referred to as proof that there are three persons in God.

The article goes on to say we know there are three persons “from their operations, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves.” What are these operations?

Article 9 comes back to this point later and explains what these are: “Moreover, we must observe the particular offices and operations of these three persons towards us. The Father is called our Creator, by His power; the Son is our Savior and Redeemer, by His blood; the Holy Ghost is our Sanctifier, by His dwelling in our hearts.”

The first point, regarding God the Father and our creation, is a point we mentioned earlier when speaking of God as the beginning. Here we consider how the coming of the Son and the sending forth of the Spirit made known more clearly that there are three persons in the one God.

The coming of the Son of God made a number of things

¹ This proof is explained this way: “For when our Lord was baptized in Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, saying, This is My beloved Son; the Son was seen in the water; and the Holy Ghost appeared in the shape of a dove.”

very clear. The Father spoke to the Son, and the Son repeatedly spoke of His Father. This made known that the Father and Son are persons distinct from one another.

This also indicated that there is communion within God. The covenant is a relationship of friendship between God and His people in Christ. It was not that God needed to create us to have friends. The three persons in God commune with one another. The true God has fellowship within Himself, and brings His people into fellowship with Him.

The sending forth of the Spirit made more things clear. The Spirit was said to be sent from the Father as well as from the Son. Therefore, the Spirit is distinct from the Father and from the Son.

Furthermore, we know it was the second person who died for us. He is the One who took upon Himself our flesh and suffered and died in our place. It was not the first person, nor was it the third. It was the eternal Son who redeemed us by His blood. We confess this in Article 8 of the Belgic Confession: “the Father hath not assumed the flesh, nor hath the Holy Ghost, but the Son only.”

The third Person, the Holy Spirit, is the One who dwells within us. He is the One who applies to us that

which we have in Christ. This operation of the Spirit we “feel in ourselves.” We know He dwells within us. He is the One who works in us faith and brings to our remembrance what our Lord has taught us.

The Son redeemed us and the Spirit sanctifies us. The Spirit works in us a godly sorrow for sin. He comforts us, assuring us that we are forgiven, that we are righteous in Christ, and that we have a right to eternal life. He also strengthens us to fight against sin and Satan, granting us the grace to begin to keep the commandments of our Lord.

Yes, indeed, we know this is true. Our God who has fellowship within Himself has spoken to us. The Spirit dwells within us and assures us He will never leave us nor forsake us. Forever He will abide with us.

May we faithfully bear witness concerning what our God has made known to us. Let us tell others about God the Father and our creation, God the Son and our redemption, and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. May we glorify and praise our God, the triune God, speaking also of the joy we have in our heart as we fellowship with Him who has fellowship within Himself.



Go ye into all the world

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

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (4)

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2021, p. 308.

Evidence of the PRCA's commitment to the three-self formula can be observed in the synodical decisions and missionary reports of the PRCA's foreign mission work. Growth in the understanding of the three-self formula and a commitment to it is evident in PRCA's past mission work in Jamaica, the first of four examples I will reference here.

Initial involvement of the PRCA in missions in Jamaica began in 1962. At some time in that year, the Mission Committee (which in years later became known as the Domestic Mission Committee) was contacted by a Rev. H. Morally from London, England, who had heard the broadcasts of the Reformed Witness Hour (PRC-sponsored radio program) through the Tran-

sworld Radio network at that time. Through the correspondence of this British contact, the Mission Committee was made aware of a group of churches in Jamaica whose members were recent converts to Christianity, who were not well established or well connected, and who needed the guidance and support of missionaries. Although correspondence apparently discontinued with this original contact, the Mission Committee was soon involved with some pastors, congregations, and mission stations. Soon, the PRCA declared Jamaica a field of mission labor under the oversight of the Mission Committee and First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. Only two missionaries were called and sent to labor in Jamaica at separate times during the thirty-year involvement of

the PRCA in Jamaica. The first missionary was Rev. George Lubbers with his wife, from 1970-1974. The second was Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma who, with his wife and children, served on the field from 1984 to 1989. In addition to full-time missionaries, the work was also served by many pastors and elders who brought preaching and instruction on periodic short-term visits among the Jamaican churches and mission stations. After thirty years of labor, the PRCA Synod made the difficult decision in 1993 that, because “all the methods which have been attempted over the course of thirty years (missionaries, emissaries, conferences) have not resulted in strong, indigenous churches...,” the involvement of the PRCA in Jamaica as a denominational work should be brought to a close.¹

Through that history of Jamaican missions, one can observe a growth in the understanding of the three-self formula as applied to that work. In 1963, when the synod officially committed the denomination to the mission work in Jamaica, it stated from the very outset regarding the goal of the mission work “...that we work in Jamaica with a view to establishing there an indigenous church...”² Of course, “indigenous” implied the elements of the three-self formula. These elements became evident in a document proposed to synod by the Mission Committee in 1965 entitled, “Suggested Program for Working Toward Sister-Church Relations between the PRCA and the PRCJ.”³ This document, with a few amendments, was adopted by the synod of the PRCA, and it was intended to guide the mission work with congregations and mission stations to the goal of indigenous churches and an indigenous federation of the PRC in Jamaica, which could then develop a sister-church relationship with the PRCA.

The adopted program stressed the need for doctrinal, church political, and liturgical unity between the PRCA and the PRCJ for the maintenance of a healthy, future sister-church relationship. The document stressed the importance that the PRCJ maintain self-government over its preaching, liturgical, and ecclesiastical affairs, and the document conveyed the recognition by the PRCA of the local churches and officebearers of the PRCJ. The document mentioned interest by the PRCA in the self-propagation of the PRCJ numerically by faithful preaching in the Reformed faith. The document mentioned the need of the PRCJ to be supporting of its own work by a reference to the necessary collections in the worship services. At that time, it was understood

that those collections would be for the general fund of the local churches and the care of the poor.⁴ Although this Jamaican mission program of 1965 did not express the three-self formula word for word, all three concepts of the three-self formula were present to some degree.

Nevertheless, there seems to be evidence that the three-self formula was not fully understood or consistently applied in subsequent years. For example, within the next ten years, the synod gave its approval that the PRCA pay the salaries of the pastors of local PRCJ congregations or pay for church buildings of the PRCJ. Interestingly, while in 1973 synod decided that no more money would be spent on church buildings in Jamaica and that payment of salaries to the local pastors needed to be curtailed, this decision was not entirely followed in 1974. Synod approved in 1974 the payment for a suitable building for one PRCJ congregation. Realizing that this decision was obviously in conflict with the 1973 decision, synod included this disclaimer note: “This is to be an exception to the restriction imposed by Art. 116 of the 1973 Acts.”⁵ In addition to that “exception,” synod approved the payment of the salaries of four local pastors. Apart from the fact that synod 1974 may have been convinced it was serving the good of the indigenous PRCJ churches, this financial practice seems to be inconsistent with the self-support principle of indigenous churches.

This phenomenon was repeated again in 1983. At that time, the PRCA Synod adopted another policy regarding the mission work in Jamaica in a document entitled, “Policy for Missions in Jamaica.” According to the minutes, the synod approved the document, but with one significant amendment in the section entitled, “Goals and Objectives.” In that section after the word “indigenous,” the words “self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating” were added by amendment.⁶ By approval of that outstanding amendment, the synod expressed that an indigenous church institute is characterized by the three-self formula and that this understanding needs to be applied in its foreign mission work in Jamaica and, by implication, in all of its work in foreign missions.

However, it appears that the synod, the Mission Committee, calling church, and the Jamaican churches did not fully understand the complete ramifications of

1 *PRCA Acts of Synod*, 1993, Art. 26, A, 4, a.

2 *PRCA Acts of Synod*, 1963, Art. 91.

3 *PRCA Acts of Synod*, 1965, Arts. 139-154.

4 The “general fund” collection was taught to support financially the ministry of the gospel, particularly, pastors (according to the biblical principle of Art. 11 of the Church Order), the seminary training for new pastors, and all related ecclesiastical work.

5 *PRCA Acts of Synod*, 1974, Arts. 84, 125-128.

6 *PRCA Acts of Synod*, 1983, Art. 25, B, 4.

the three-self formula. After the 1983 Synod had adopted the significant statement of the three-self formula in its mission policy for Jamaica, the synod approved that it would pay the salaries of local pastors and a seminary student of the PRCJ. It seems there was a lack of understanding concerning “self-support” not merely as a goal, but also as an essential part of the character of indigenous church institutes.

Eventually, however, the PRCA brought its practice in line with the principle expressed in its 1983 policy. The direct financial support of the local PRCJ pastors from the PRCA was brought to a brotherly closure over a seven-year period. The synod did this having realized the inconsistency of its actions with the financial aspects of the three-self formula and having become aware of that by many reports of the money problems that its inconsistency had caused within the PRCJ. In 1990, the synod was informed by the Mission Committee and the calling church that all of financial salaries to the pastors of the PRCJ had been phased out completely.

From this history, it can be remembered that adoption of the three-self formula requires a full understanding and consistency in its application in mission work. Consistency is understandably difficult and challenging for any churches who have engaged in cross-cultural, cross-economic, foreign missions. The history of missions chronicles the evidence of that unavoidable struggle

of the application of the three-self formula. As a result of that common struggle, we should not be reluctant and afraid to submit to healthy and humbling self-examination in regard to the three-self formula so that, if there might be some inconsistency or an error perhaps, the mission work can be reformed and restored to a complete, healthy, and wise commitment to the three-self formula in faithfulness to the Lord of the harvest.

A full commitment is necessary because even foreign mission history demonstrates that the three-self formula is a unity, like a stable, three-legged stool. If one of the three ‘legs’ of the three-self formula is not being taught, embraced, implemented, and maintained within the indigenous mission groups and, eventually, church institutes, then one cannot expect such local churches to maintain stability in the face of spiritual opposition and trials on the wobbly support of only one or two ‘legs.’ With even one ‘leg’ missing or with the ‘legs’ not capable of holding any weight, it is expected that such local churches will suffer greatly or topple over completely when the Lord sends them through tribulation and trouble.

In the next article, we will observe and learn from a second example of the PRCA commitment to the three-self formula in its mission labors in Singapore from 1979 to 1986.



Strength of youth

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan

Amusement: The mind's escape from reality

Stressed by all the approaching due dates of his college classes, Johnny comes home wanting only to escape into his video-game adventures for a while. Molly's mind swirls from all the drama of her high school relationships and yearns again to lose herself in a fantasy novel. Mother, her mind filled with chores, errands, and concerns about the children, cannot wait to take a break and scroll through the newsfeed on her phone or tablet. Dad, troubled by problems at work and controversy at church, just wants to drown out his thoughts with something on the HD big screen and surround-sound system. Each of them tries hard to

block out the matters of the day and the incidents of the week.

As our society multiplies its forms of sensory stimulating entertainment, our minds are drawn almost uncontrollably to a different world—one that is artificially designed to distract us. It is a realm of diversion. It is a domain where we can escape deep and serious thinking and engage in the pleasure of amusement.

The word “amuse” means just that. “Muse” means to meditate or think deeply, and the “a” in “amuse” means “not.” Amusement is non-thinking—that is, not thinking about what is significant.

Escape from reality into this sphere of amusement takes place in a wide variety of ways, but video games immediately come to mind. With phones, tablets, PC's, consoles, and other devices, there is a euphoric element of control. Young *and old*—male *and female*—fill up their lives with gaming. Using their fingers, they control their contrived characters in sporting events, wild adventures, and many other fantastical challenges. No doubt, there is skill involved; there is critical thinking and hand-eye coordination. But it all takes place in a fake world.

By musing upon today's amusement, one can easily recognize the diverse ways we attempt to zone out of real life. Many truly lose themselves in any new world created by high-definition audio and visual technology. Our minds love to be carried along by the special effects on the screen, big or small. Although we often deny it, we become vicarious participants of a different realm. Caught up in a sporting event, we envision ourselves performing that last great play. Watching a scene of sin, we take on the thoughts and feelings to “have pleasure in them that do them” (Rom. 1:32). Celebrating with the hero of a show, we experience the thrill of their victory. Sucked into a fascinating theory of conspiracy, we fill our minds with suspicions and what *might* be true. Scrolling through social media feeds, we lose ourselves in the lives of others (or in the lives that they claim to live). How often do we plug into a drastically different domain just to drown out the sights and sounds of our own?

Although the technological mode of escape is most prevailing, some still find the doorway to this world of amusement through the reading of fictional books. Within these books and lengthy series of books, one is able to fly through fairy or sci-fi kingdoms, enjoying the exhilarating disengagement from reality. After all, riding on dragons and battling wicked wizards are much more interesting activities than chores and the mundane matters of a weekday, right? Although less stimulating to the senses than digital technology, novels are also amusing means of escape from the real world.

So is such amusement sinful of itself? Some may say so; others may disdain it as foolish frivolity. Yet Scrip-

ture does not speak of entertainment as evil of itself. While there are numerous kinds of amusements that are inherently evil, diversions as reprieve from the difficult realities of life are not necessarily sin. God gives us times of leisure. His gifts to us on this earth include playing games (yes, I grudgingly admit, even video games), watching something entertaining on a screen, and reading fictional stories. Applicable are Paul's words: “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (I Tim. 4:4). In measure, our minds may engage upon the imaginary.

In measure, we may receive this pleasure. And yet how challenging it is to practice self-control. Amused by the titillations of a digital get-away, too many minds become obsessed with fantasy rather than reality. Devices seem to be *controlling* rather than *being controlled*. Minds, either bored with the ordinary or pained by the trials of real life, crave more and more the numbing stimulations of mental images from a fake world.

But God has called us to live in this world, not an imaginary one. “Whatsoever things are true,” He says, “...think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). He has given us “the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16), not to fill with the trivial but to dwell on the spiritual. Engaged with reality, the mind is supposed to be “understanding the times” (I Cor. 12:32), “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18).

Frequent escapes to amusement hinders the mind from pondering the realities of this life and of the life to come. It may feel stimulated, but the mind does not mature spiritually. It is not exercised unto godliness. It does not acquire the discipline of meditation upon God's Word day and night. It does not learn the lessons it is supposed to learn from the difficult experiences of life. Careful thought on the doctrines of God's Word and its applications to daily life are neglected, and honest self-examination rarely happens.

Although there are many explanations for spiritual immaturity in the church today, young people and their parents need to consider seriously whether too much amusement is the problem. Are we amusing ourselves

...how challenging it is to practice self-control. Amused by the titillations of a digital get-away, too many minds become obsessed with fantasy rather than reality. Devices seem to be controlling rather than being controlled. Minds, either bored with the ordinary or pained by the trials of real life, crave more and more the numbing stimulations of mental images from a fake world.

to death?¹ Are grown men lacking in maturity because they have been too busy thinking about their games? Is the next generation unable to partake in meaningful conversation and real-life relationships because their minds are engaged with fake people in a fantasy world? Is there an increase in selfish manipulation and control because that's what man-made worlds are made of? Is the mind desensitized to (and even mesmerized by) violence, illicit sex, and black magic within these amusing realms? How much virtual reality is the next generation actually believing to be reality?

While these questions should and must be consid-

ered, the most critical question is this: What should we turn to for true escape as we deal with the difficult realities of life? The escape of amusement is not the answer. True freedom from the cares of this world comes by turning to the reality of Jesus Christ in faith. Meditating on Him, the psalmist confesses, "Thy lovingkindness is better than life" (Ps. 63:3). We find rest in His promises "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (II Cor. 4:18a). Though less stimulating to our senses and more difficult for our flesh to realize, our Savior alone provides true and lasting pleasure. As the mind meditates upon Him in His Word, there is true escape. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Is. 26:3).

¹ A phrase borrowed from a book by Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which congregation in the PRCA became the denomination's first "English speaking congregation?" Answer later in this column.

Minister activities

Hudsonville PRC formed a new trio of Rev. R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace PRC–Spokane, WA), Rev. E. Guichelaar (Randolph PRC), and Rev. R. Barnhill (Peace PRC–Dyer, IN). Rev. R. Kleyn received this call.

Rev. R. Barnhill (Peace PRC–Dyer, IN) declined the calls from Wingham PRC and Kalamazoo PRC.

Crete PRC called Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon PRC). Rev. Engelsma was directed by God to accept Crete's call. Rev. Engelsma preached his farewell sermon on August 1, with a farewell program following. The moving company showed up in Doon on August 2, and Rev. Engelsma was scheduled to be ordained in Crete PRC on August 15 with Prof. D. Engelsma leading the service.

Rev. C. Griess received the call as replacement for Prof. B. Gritters in the PR Theological Seminary as Professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies. Rev. J. Engelsma was chosen as the alternate should Rev. Griess decline. Rev. Griess accepted this call on July 11 and preached his farewell sermon on August 8.

First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI called Rev. R. Kleyn to be their pastor.

Rev. D. Lee and Rev. J. Marcus are eligible for calls in the PRC and her sister churches. Let us remember them in prayer as they await new charges.

Kalamazoo PRC formed a new trio of Revs. M. De Boer, C. Haak, and D. Lee. On August 1, they voted to call Rev. DeBoer.

Josiah Tan, candidate for the ministry in his home church, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, has returned to Singapore with his wife and family. The Session made him the sole candidate for the CERC, and on August 9 the congregation voted to call him. May God abide with them, and if it be His will, lead Candidate Tan to accept the call to service as a minister of the Word and sacraments in our sister church in Singapore.

Help for Wingham PRC: With Consistory approval, Rev. Guichelaar planned to make a four-week visit to Wingham, Ontario, from July 19–August 16. The first two weeks were to serve as the final two weeks of his vacation time, during which time a mandatory 14-day quarantine would have to be observed. In the two weeks that follow, Rev. Guichelaar planned to lead worship services in Wingham PRC. During those final two

weeks, Rev. Guichelaar also intended to offer himself in any way he can to the Wingham PRC consistory and congregation. Wingham PRC has been without a minister for approximately nine months, and due to border closings has not been able to get any pulpit supply from Classis East since becoming vacant. Rev. Guichelaar was in a unique position to give Wingham PRC pulpit supply since he possesses Canadian citizenship and should have no trouble crossing the border. Planning a trip like this also allowed Rev. Guichelaar and his family to visit with family that they had not been able to see in some time.

Evangelism activities

“Still Totally Depraved?” Trinity PRC invited all to come and hear a lecture by Prof. David Engelsma on this very timely topic. It was held on Friday July 30, 2021, 7:30 P.M. at Fair Haven Church in Hudsonville, MI, and a good crowd was in attendance.

The Crete Evangelism Committee is planning their annual Reformation Day lecture for October 29, 2021. Mr. Dan VanUffelen, teacher of church history at Covenant Christian High School, will speak: “Post Tenebras Lux: The Vocation Reformation.”

Singles conference

There will be a single’s conference at Peace PRC in Dyer, Indiana on October 8 and 9 for singles 25 and up. Please plan on attending.

School activities

This coming year is the 25th anniversary of Eastside Christian School. They are planning a special “Picnic on the Patio” celebration to be held on the evening of Saturday, September 11. Alumni and supporters are invited to join us!

Save the date of Friday evening, September 24 at 7:00 P.M. at Heritage PRC for the annual Christian education lecture and an open house sponsored by the School Society in Sioux Falls to commemorate the opening of Sioux Falls PRCS. Rev. Jonathan Langerak will be the speaker, with an open house at the school, fellowship, and refreshments to follow!

Trivia answer

According to the minutes of Classis in 1930 (before there was a synod) the first “English speaking congregation” was the one in Holland, MI. We suppose that means no Dutch in the service. And don’t miss the irony of it—the church in that area where the Dutch first settled in West Michigan. More trivia next time.

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

Announcements

Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Phil and Renae Baas in the death of Phil’s brother, **Ken Baas**, who died at the age of 72. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.... The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:1, 11).

Rev. D. Noorman, President
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Steve Kuiper; children, Paula and Marco Barone, Mark Kuiper, David and Ally Kuiper, Holly Kuiper, and Cynthia Kuiper; mother, Marilyn Schipper; and family in the death of Steve’s wife, **Debra Lynn Kuiper**. Debra, age 55, went to be with her Lord on July 22, 2021. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

Rev. D. Noorman, President
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

Announcements continued

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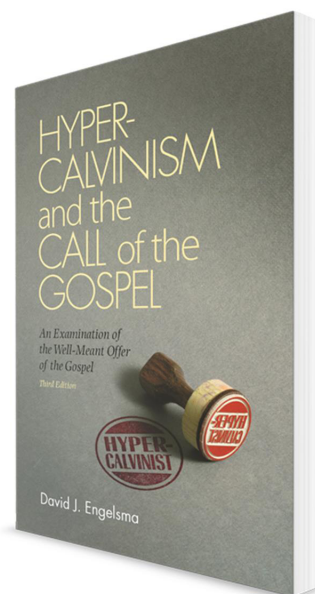
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Seminary Convocation/Installation

On Wednesday, September 15 a special worship service for the installation of Rev. C. Griess as professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary will be held in Southwest PRC at 7 P.M. Prof. B. Gritters will lead the service. Seminary convocation will also be included, with a time of fellowship afterwards. The service will be live-streamed at southwestprc.org.

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Crete, IL, on Wednesday, September 29, 2021, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Crete's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

RFPA Annual Meeting

September 23, 7:30 P.M., in Trinity PRC is the time and place for the annual meeting of the RFPA. Come and hear Prof. B. Huizinga speak on "2021 in the PRC: Whom the Lord Loveth, He Chasteneth." The purpose of this speech is to provide a scriptural understanding of and response to recent significant events that have unfolded in the PRC.

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. C. Haak

September 5—Worshiping God in the Light of His Goodness Nehemiah 9:1-31
September 12—Let Not Our Trouble Seem Little to Thee Nehemiah 9:32-38
September 19—Covenant Renewal Nehemiah 10
September 26—Jerusalem Filled with Boys and Girls Playing Nehemiah 11