

# The Standard Bearer

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**“Yet I will rejoice”**  
**Thanksgiving meditation**

Rev. Dennis Lee

**Synods 2020/2021 and “in the  
way of repentance”**

Prof. Brian Huizinga

**Racheting up the rhetoric**

Rev. Martyn McGeown

**A greater than Jonah**

Rev. Ronald Hanko

**The pity party**

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani



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## Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

# “Yet I will rejoice”: Thanksgiving through all times and seasons

**Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.**

**Habakkuk 3:17-19**

The book of Habakkuk is a book that is little known and, accordingly, little is known about its contents except perhaps chapter 2:20, which is commonly used in worship services to call God’s people unto silence and awe before the holy God in His holy temple.

Yet it is a book replete with precious instruction, an example of which is found here in these verses that conclude the book. With a burning and shining zeal for the LORD that he demonstrated throughout the book, Habakkuk ends his prophecy with an astounding confession made in the midst of deep adversity. It is a confession of true and joyful thanksgiving, containing precious instruction that we do well to give heed to, especially in anticipation of the national holiday and celebration of Thanksgiving.

### Astounding confession

“Yet I will rejoice”! is the astounding confession of joyful thanksgiving by the prophet. The striking character of Habakkuk’s joyful thanksgiving at once comes to light when we consider the occasion in which it was made.

What was the occasion? This was the time in the Old Testament church when the prophet served the LORD during the early kingship of King Josiah in Judah. Josiah’s father, Ammon, was a wicked king who led the nation into terrible idolatry and apostasy. In contrast, Josiah was a godly king, who did much reformation work for the nation throughout his lengthy reign. However, he had ascended the throne as a young boy and it was during that time that the prophet Habakkuk was

in active ministry. The occasion, therefore, under the terrible religious circumstances in Judah, was that of heavy chastisement by the LORD for the sins of His people. They would eventually be carried away captive by the Chaldeans.

But they would also suffer a terrible, all-comprehensive economic disaster. This the prophet tells us in verse 17: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fall, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls.” In the land of Israel, the fig tree and olive tree represented very basic food for the people. Figs were used to make bread and cakes, and the oil from the olive was used for baking and a host of other food preparation methods. So when there are no figs and no olives; and when, in addition to that, the fields are barren so that there is no crop and agriculture fails; and when there is also no livestock, the entire nation is in an economic disaster that is deep and wide.

Under such circumstances, how would anyone exult in joyful thanksgiving? Dear reader, how is it with you? During this holiday season of Thanksgiving, will you exult in joyful thanksgiving? Perhaps like the prophet, you are experiencing great economic difficulty. Or perhaps, other troubles are plaguing you at this time: a serious illness, the death of a spouse or child and its lingering effects, great uncertainty over your future, or division within the family and close extended family brought about by schism in the churches. Whatever the circumstance, you are saddened, troubled and even overwhelmed by it. Will you exult in joyful thanksgiving?

Remarkably, this is exactly what Habakkuk did: “Yet I will rejoice”! That was the sound of joyful thanksgiving the prophet uttered to God from the heart! Astounding confession this is! To be sure, he had struggled with God’s revelation of chastisement—a struggle well documented in the preceding chapters of the book. But here and now in these verses, Habakkuk had experienced peace within his heart. He was content with

God's difficult but right and good way for him and for the people he loves dearly.

"Yet I will rejoice"! This cry of joyful thanksgiving from the prophet teaches us two things about true thanksgiving. First, it teaches us that true thanksgiving is not dependent on our external circumstances. Those circumstances may be so very bleak, as was the case with Habakkuk. Or perhaps those circumstances may be so very bright: when we have peace, health, and enjoy much in earthly abundance. Either way, it does not matter. True thanksgiving is not dependent on our external circumstances. The prophet's confession of joyful thanksgiving demonstrates this. And if that be the case, then second, his astounding confession also teaches us that true thanksgiving is for all times and all seasons. For if true thanksgiving is not dependent on our external circumstances in any way and especially endures in the bleakest of circumstances, then it stands to reason that there will not be a time or season in which thanksgiving ceases. It ever abides! "Yet I will rejoice..."!

True thanksgiving is joyful thanksgiving! True thanksgiving is not dependent on our external circumstances! True thanksgiving abides through all times and all seasons! Such was the nature of the prophet's astounding confession.

### Only explanation

What explains such a confession? There is but one explanation and it is set forth in verse 18: "I will joy in *the God of my salvation*." There are two parts to this answer. To begin with, take note that the idea underlying the word "salvation" in the original is "freedom." Salvation is freedom! Freedom from what? And freedom unto what?

This is a freedom from the bondage of sin. That is right: sin is bondage! Be not deceived by the devil: sin is not pleasure! It is bondage! Sin takes hold of us, takes us captive, and makes us slaves to it. It is a corrupting power! And with that corruption and power, there is also the guilt that afflicts the one who is sinning. This is due to the fact that we know what is right and wrong, and when we sin, we know that what we are doing is wrong. Accordingly, our souls are smitten with the guilt of our sin. Salvation frees us from both the corruption and guilt of sin. This is what the cross of our only Savior Jesus Christ does. The blood of Jesus Christ atoned for our sins through and through! It washed away the guilty stains of our sins once and for all! And more and more, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the sinful but elect sinner overcomes the corrupting power of sin. More and more, we become like our holy Savior and live

in greater love unto God and unto our neighbor. We are freed from the bondage of sin.

But more, such is the greatness of our salvation that we are also set free unto communion and life with God. We are freed to live as friends with our absolute Sovereign and Friend, the covenant God of friendship. In Christ we are freed to love Him, serve Him, and walk with Him in His ways. The bondage of sin only makes us to flee from Him. But the greatness of God's grace is such that it causes us to do just the opposite: to seek Him, flee unto Him through His Son for all we need, and cleave unto Him as friends with Friend for our help, our refuge and our strength.

We have God; we have Him living in us and taking our hand by His hand. He is leading and guiding us through life—even in adversity—onward and upward to heaven! In this God with whom we are freed unto sweet communion and friendship we exult in joyful thanksgiving that is ever-abiding, steadfast, and sure! For this covenant God who holds us in His hand and guides us through life is the almighty God. The almighty God who made all things by His absolute power! The almighty God who continues to uphold and govern all things in heaven and on earth! The almighty God who causes sinners whom He chooses of His eternal, good pleasure to come irresistibly to Him and holds them safely through all life—even through adversity—so that no one can pluck them out of His hand. The almighty God who reveals to all His friends that He is their LORD—the great I AM and covenant God of friendship, who in His unchanging love towards His sinful people declares to them, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

Because of this unchanging LORD of covenant love and faithfulness, Habakkuk makes this astounding confession of joy and thanksgiving: "Yet I will rejoice..."! Is this not what the prophet himself tells us in verse 19: "The Lord God is *my strength*, and He will..."? Such is the strength needed for our souls to be lifted up when under great adversity! Human strength, however strong, will fall short and fail miserably. Only supernatural, divine strength and power will do! God's strength alone can and does lift us up from sadness unto joyful thanksgiving. In His abiding love and great faithfulness, the LORD gave that strength to Habakkuk so that he could exult in joyful thanksgiving. What He did for Habakkuk, He does for every one of His dear children—even for you and for me!

But there is more. That astounding confession is but part of what divine strength and power brings to all of us who receive it.



## Blessed response

It goes on unto a most blessed activity of faith. Note the blessed response of faith that the prophet gives expression to: “He will make my feet like hinds’ feet and he will make me to walk upon mine high places” (v. 19b); and “To the chief singer of my stringed instruments” (v. 19c). In a word, the prophet confesses

that he is not only lifted up out of sadness and gloom, he is also and even more, lifted up unto zealous, hopeful, and energetic living unto and praise of his God.

Let there also be such a blessed response of faith arising from within us during this season of Thanksgiving and always!



## Editorial

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

# Synods 2020/2021 and “in the way of repentance” (1)

The purpose of this editorial and those that follow is to provide theological instruction on the disputed issue of the doctrine of repentance as it was treated by Synods 2020 and 2021 of the PRC. The origin of the dispute was the protest of a minister’s sermon on Proverbs 28:13. Before I lay out the background to the case as it appeared at consecutive synods, a couple of comments are in order by way of introduction.

## Introduction

First, one of the lessons we have learned in recent years is that it is necessary for the church through her teaching ministry to lay out the disputed doctrinal issues on which synod has ruled in order to provide explanation and elaboration for the people of God. As a deliberative assembly, synod has a job to do. But synods do not convene so that ministers and elders can sit down and do theology by studying the Scriptures together with the goal of bringing the church’s knowledge of God to a higher state of development. When synods take up theological matters, it is because some concrete case has been brought before the body for its judgment, for example, an appeal regarding the protest of the doctrinal content of a sermon. Even the monumental and lengthy doctrinal deliverances of the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) are not five canons of doctrinal formulations produced by a body of theologians that decided to sit down and give a comprehensive explanation of Scripture’s teaching on the doctrines of sovereign grace, but are specific responses to the five Articles of the Remonstrants that had been causing agitation in the Dutch churches. In the course of answering an appeal, a synod will study

the matter, make a judgment on the basis of Scripture and the confessions, and formulate grounds in support of its decision. Those grounds will necessarily enter into the theological issue and set forth argumentation. Nevertheless, synod is acting more like a judge than a theologian, and thus its decisions are typically succinct, containing the minimal amount of explanation needed to settle the case and no elaboration. Therefore, when synod adjudicates a case brought before it by way of protest/appeal, it is necessary and helpful for the church to respond by providing further explanation and elaboration.

Further instruction is the labor to which the church has called the minister of the gospel as a Reformed theologian. The duty falls particularly to the seminary professor, whose task according to the Church Order is “to expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors” (Art. 18). This series of editorials, therefore, is intentionally designed to be scriptural exposition, and it will demonstrate from the Scriptures, as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative rule for faith and life, the faithfulness of the decisions of our broader assemblies.

The benefits of explanation and elaboration are many. The church is edified when the members receive *clarity* so that they can clearly discern the line between truth and error. Furthermore, the knowledge of the church is *sharpened* and *developed*. When there is a matter of dispute and a certain doctrine is being looked at from two different and even opposing points of view, the Spirit leads the way through the problem and usually leads the church into deeper understanding. Finally,

the benefit of explanation is a *defense* of the church and her decisions against any threat of misrepresentation.

A second important point to make by way of introduction is that we all ought to recognize that when we handle the doctrine of repentance, we are touching one of the greatest wonders wrought by God. Repentance is simply astounding. How many events on earth cause eruptions of jubilation in heaven? Marriage is a wonder, even a great mystery as God makes two one (Eph. 5:31-32). Child birth is marvelous and that our soul knows right well, for from the womb emerges a new life fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Ps. 139:14). Our hearts are stirred and our tongues shout for joy, but Scripture does not tell us that the angels in heaven rejoice when a godly couple is joined in holy wedlock or when a new baby is born (Christ's birth excepted). Repentance is different. Repentance is astounding, as we shall see, and when God brings one sinner to repentance, the Scripture tells us there is great joy in the presence of the angels (Luke 15:7, 10).

Repentance ought to stir you and me also. The wonder of it should keep us from proceeding in a purely academic and formal manner, and ought to warm our hearts and inspire us with worship and joy. But, most importantly, we must be warned against reading about repentance and seeking a deeper understanding of the concept in our minds while knowing nothing of it experientially in our own heart and life. Impenitent sinners who cover their sins shall not prosper.

And that brings us to the text of Scripture that occasioned a dispute.

## Background

In November of 2018 a Protestant Reformed minister preached a sermon on Proverbs 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." In that sermon the minister said,

But, to repeat, not on the basis of his repentance and not with repentance as some instrument, but in the way of his repentance, in the way of our repentance. Beloved, we have mercy, we have mercy of God. It's not true simply that he that confesses and he that has mercy are the same person, of course that's true. But that's not the main or the only point of the passage, to simply say the one who confesses and the one who has mercy is the same person. But the text means to instruct us that it is in the way of confession, in the way of repentance that we have the mercy of God. And, beloved, that's true with regard to all of our sins. On the one hand, covering the smallest sin, one will not

prosper. But on the other hand, confessing the greatest sin, one has mercy. The free unmerited mercy of God in Jesus Christ... (*Acts of Synod 2020*, pp. 195-96).

An individual protested this sermon and charged that it "militated" against the decisions made earlier that year at Synod 2018 (*Acts 2020*, p. 190). The protestant wrote, "When you preach that not only the one who does the good work of confession and the one who has mercy are the same person, but that the text is teaching that 'in the way of' the good work of confession one receives (i.e., 'proceed[s] on towards') mercy, you put the good work of confession before the receipt of mercy by faith" (*Acts 2020*, p. 198). The protestant added, "...you preach works as coming before blessing. Synod has judged that works are 'fruits' and, therefore, cannot come before, but must come after receiving and knowing God's mercy by faith" (*Acts 2020*, p. 199).

The protestant was objecting to the teaching that "in the way of repentance we have the mercy of God." The protestant was also objecting to a clear implication. When the minister said the text was not merely teaching that "he that confesses and he that has mercy are the same person..." the minister was clearly implying that the "confession" of which the text speaks precedes the "mercy" of which the text speaks when it says, "but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The protestant was contending that this teaching of the minister militated against the doctrinal decisions of Synod 2018. Synod 2018 had judged that in certain statements found in sermons a minister had given to good works a place and function out of harmony with the Reformed confessions, which then "compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ" (*Acts 2018*, p. 70). When later in the year this same minister preached a sermon on Proverbs 28:13, the protestant objected and essentially argued, "The minister is doing it again. He is giving to good works a place and function they do not have, and is once again compromising the gospel."

The consistory overseeing the minister responded to the protestant and said in so many words, "No, the minister is not preaching error, and is not militating against Synod 2018. You are mistaken." The protest was not sustained.

The individual, therefore, appealed to Classis. Classis rejected the appeal, defended the minister, and declared that the minister's teaching that "in the way of repentance we have the mercy of God," is in harmony with the decisions of Synod 2018, the Confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 32; Canons, V, 5) and Scripture (Ps. 32:3-4; Is. 55:7) (*Acts 2020*, pp. 77-79). Classis also explained that the minister did not militate against

Synod 2018 when he taught the idea “that there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God” (*Acts 2020*, pp. 78-79, emphasis Classis’).

The individual then appealed to Synod 2020, which rejected the appeal and gave as its grounds the grounds from Classis (*Acts 2020*, pp. 79-82). To Synod 2021 came another individual with a protest against this decision of Synod 2020, contending that the decision of Synod 2020 contradicts the Scripture, the confessions, and Synod 2018/19. The individual asserted that the decision of Synod 2020 is “the lie” (*Acts 2021*, p. 89), and stated, “The question before Synod 2021, therefore is, ‘Which is the truth?’ Are good works fruits of faith and thus the way in which we live in the covenant as the expression of our thanksgiving for all the blessings of salvation we have and enjoy by faith? (Synod 2018 and 2019). Or are good works activities that occur prior to the experience of particular blessings and thus the way in which particular blessings of salvation are received? (Synod 2020).” The protestant also argued that the confessions do not support the teaching that “there is an activity of the believer that is prior to the experience of particular blessings from God” (*Acts 2021*, pp. 89-90).

Synod 2021 responded with its decision (see *Acts 2021*, pp. 119-124). In that decision synod demonstrated how the decisions of Synod 2020 are in perfect harmony with the decisions of Synod 2018/2019; how the protestant failed to interact with synod’s scriptural grounds, which are the proof of synod’s teaching; and how the protestant errs in denying that a God-worked activity of the believer can be prior to the experience of a particular blessing from God.

## In summary

With its decision and grounds regarding the truth of repentance, the synod, both in 2020 and 2021, was not setting forth some new thing, some heretofore undiscovered truth, some novel interpretation, or some new way ministers ought to preach repentance. When the synod taught that there is a God-worked activity of the believer that precedes a certain blessing from God, the synod was not turning the focus from God to man, or making man first and God second, or teaching ministers to emphasize man and his activity in their preaching. The synod was not flirting with conditional theology and introducing repentance as a new condition the believer must fulfill in order to receive mercy, as if God’s will to bestow mercy hinges upon the believer’s will to repent of his sins. The synod was not introducing some profane species of covenantal bargaining in which the ‘party’ man meets the ‘party’ God and they both agree that, if man does his part and repents, then God will do His part and forgive.

The synod, in 2020 and again in 2021, was simply vindicating against error the long-standing teaching of the PRC that the believing sinner enjoys God’s mercy in the way of repentance. The teaching of the PRC is the teaching of Scripture, the confessions, and the orthodox Reformed tradition. The synod was protecting the Word of God and the preaching of it against the charge that it is the “lie.” If the minister cannot mount the pulpit and explain Proverbs 28:13 by preaching that “in the way of repentance we have the mercy of God,” then the mouth piece of Jehovah is muzzled from proclaiming the Word of God.

Is repentance a good work? I will begin there next time.

## Apology

The purpose of this letter is to apologize. From November 15, 2020 through January 15, 2021, I wrote a series of five articles on the seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Witsius, reflecting on his book entitled *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions, on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomianism and Neonomians*. On account of objections raised against these articles, working with my consistory, and discussions with a number of my colleagues, I am persuaded that I owe the readers of the *SB* an apology.

As I informed my consistory and the readers in my articles on Witsius, I was persuaded that the statements I commented on could be explained in such a way as

to harmonize with our Synod’s decisions, that is, when considered in the light of the error Witsius was opposing and then his fuller explanation. My consistory pointed out that a number of Witsius’ statements, as they are worded, no matter how I read them and was convinced what Witsius meant by them, stand in contradiction to decisions of our recent synods (in particular those of 2018) and to our confessions, and thus constitute false doctrine. As a result, the articles, instead of helping clarify issues in our present controversy over the place and function of good works in the life of the child of God, sowed confusion and, in light of Synod 2018’s decisions, promoted statements and theology that Synod judged to be erroneous.



In particular I was pointed to Witsius stating, in the context of the utility (usefulness) of holiness and good works, that “Scripture teaches that something must be done that we may be saved”; also to the statement, “We must accurately distinguish between a right to life and the possession of life.... But certainly, our works, or rather those, which the Spirit of Christ worketh in us and by us, *contribute* something to the latter [that is, to the possession of life and salvation]”; and also to Witsius’ statement, “Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the souls as to its justification.”

My attempt to explain what Witsius meant by these phrases in an orthodox fashion did not help clear up confusion, but contributed to it, as if such wording and phrases could be still be considered orthodox and language that I would approve of today. Let me state categorically, I do not. And I certainly do not maintain that good works are to serve along with faith as a secondary instrument to assure one of justification, of one being counted righteous before God. Faith, based on Christ’s atoning sacrifice, is the one only instrument.

I do not propose we use Witsius’ language in the preaching, nor would I suggest we approve of it if it were used. No more than I would approve in our day of using the word “conditions” in connection with life in covenant. Such words and phrases have come to be loaded with erroneous connotations and ought not have our approval today. I should have made that clear in my articles, but did not, leading to unnecessary questions and confusion. For this I am sorry and apologize.

Whatever Witsius may have meant or intended by them, they are not phrases or words we should use from Protestant Reformed pulpits. Nor should they have our approval if used. As they stand, they would teach that man’s good works function as an instrument through which the believer receives or gains some aspect of salvation. This is error to which I do not subscribe.

I am sorry for the confusion and resulting unrest these articles have caused. I assure you, as I did my consistory, that I wholeheartedly agree with and subscribe to the decisions of our recent synods, repudiating all that is contrary to them.

*Rev. Kenneth Koole*

## Letters

### Added thoughts on the Christian and amusement

Dear editor,

I would like to add some thoughts to Rev. Mahtani’s timely article “Amusement: The mind’s escape from reality.” [SB, Sept. 1, 2021]

Rev. Mahtani writes, “God gives us time for leisure.” The Lord made the beautiful creation, the birds, fields, mountains, flowers, that we may enjoy them in a leisurely stroll or garden work. The Lord “gives His beloved sleep,” in which restful sleep we do not at all think about reality but “escape” it. He gives us six days to labor, and the seventh to “rest.” God gives us wine “to make the hearts of men merry.” He enjoins us to “enjoy the fruit of our labors.”

All these amusements are to be used in the service of God. “Do all for the glory of God,” even playing video games. How do we do this? While one way is certainly that it glorifies God when we enjoy the good things He has gifted us with, I’d like to point out another aspect, in connection with which Rev. Mahtani writes, “diversions as reprieve from the difficult realities of life are not necessarily sin...in measure, we may receive them.”

I believe we can go a step further: such diversions are even *necessary* in the Christian life.

The wise Christian understands his own weaknesses, and that traversing through this dry and hot desert of sin and strenuous labor requires occasional (sometimes even frequent) refreshing rests at a cool oasis. This required rest is not only spiritual (praying, Sabbath observance, etc.) but also physical, emotional, and psychological, for we belong to our Savior in soul *and* body. “The Lord knoweth our frame, that we are dust,” and in His kindness partly provides ‘amusement’ for it.

The mother who has a stressful, busy day with her kids needs regular “downtime” to have a bath and read good fiction. The minister benefits from team sports activities where for an hour his mind is immersed in chasing the ball and physically competing with other men. And, of course, it is integral to healthy childhood that children play.

Combined with spiritual refreshment, the mother and minister are then strengthened in both soul and body (which includes also the mind) to engage again in the labors of the kingdom.



“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall,” is true also for our approach to amusement. Beware, lest we think that we are stronger than we are, and despise the amusement God provides for us. Christian ministers and men sometimes have a “burn out.” Sometimes covenant homes become places of constant shouting and stress. How many of these situations could have been avoided through a healthy use of amusement?

Thus, amusement is used by the wise Christian not as an escape from his Christian duties but as an indispensable and God-given aid to it. In this way, it is to be used in a good conscience, to God’s glory. It ought not merely be tolerated as a necessary evil, or as something stronger Christians tolerate in weaker Christians. There is Christian liberty in how much and what kind of non-sinful amusement is needed, but not in whether it is needed.

In conclusion, it seems to me a key criteria to help us Christians properly evaluate and control our (non-sinful) amusement activities is this: Is our amusement helping us, or hindering us, from leading godly lives?

Yours in Christ,

*Manuel Kuhs*

Member of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, Ballymena, Northern Ireland

## Thanks for the SB in prison

Dear *Standard Bearer*,

I am writing to inform you that you may end my subscription to your magazine as of October 1, 2021. This subscription was provided by Trinity PRC [Hudsonville, MI]. Please extend my thanks to them for this subscription and the many books that they have sent to me over the past couple of years.

I would also like to thank you for the many wonderful articles I have read over the years. They have provided many insights to some of the teachings of Calvin, Herman Hoeksema, David Engelsma, Herman Hanko, etc., just to name a few from the great Reverends from the PRCA. I do plan on renewing my subscription....

I would like to thank everyone at the *Standard Bearer* and PRCA for being willing to reach out to prisoners. I can’t even begin to tell you how much knowledge I have gained and how much I have grown. You have also helped me introduce the Word of God to other men in the system along with members of my family.

May God the Father continue to bless your church according to His will.

Sincerely,

*Anthony Corbin*  
Garland, TX



## All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI

# Racheting up the rhetoric

## Introduction

The schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) affects life “all around us.” Much more significant than any other issue is the rift that has taken place in our churches, separating very friends and families from one another. While the leaders of the schism call it a “reformation,” I call it what it is: a sinful division in the church of Jesus Christ.

The schism is being kept active by ratcheting up rhetoric. Rhetoric is “the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing.” To ratchet something up is “to increase repeatedly and by small amounts.” Such we

have seen “all around us,” as accusations against the PRC become increasingly shrill. The effect, if not the purpose, is to keep the followers of the schism devoted to the cause while raising doubt in the minds of others.

## A brief history

The controversy in the PRC was occasioned by the preaching of a former pastor, whose sermons were protested because “the believer’s good works [were] given a place and function out of harmony with the Reformed confessions” (Synod 2018). This doctrine condemned at Synod 2018 was called the “devil’s

theology” in a now infamous sermon on Jeremiah 23, for which another former pastor, one of the leaders of the schism, was deposed. Synod 2018 had identified error, error for which the preacher apologized, but had not labeled the error as “heresy,” “federal vision,” or “the conditional covenant.” Synod 2018 did say, however, “The doctrinal error of the sermons then compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised by this error.” Our synod took the error seriously. Synod also did not charge the former pastor with *deliberately* compromising the gospel, the unconditional covenant, or justification by faith alone, or with *deliberately* displacing the perfect work of Christ.

Synod 2018 was preceded by meetings of Classis East, which treated objections against the preaching of that former pastor. In the Jeremiah 23 sermon those meetings of Classis East were characterized thus: “The whole Classis rose up and excused it [the devil’s theology].” By this explanation one might have imagined that the error was ignored and even approved by Classis East. He might even have concluded that the whole Classis gave a “clean bill of health” to the former preacher with respect to his preaching, and that they praised the consistory for its work in overseeing their former pastor’s preaching. In fact, while the protest was not upheld because Classis did not judge the former pastor guilty of the charges brought against him (heresy, federal vision, conditional covenant, and the like), the preaching, preacher, and consistory were criticized, a criticism to which the preacher and his consistory *submitted*.

### Willful misrepresentation

“The whole Classis rose up and excused [the devil’s theology]” is, therefore, not an honest evaluation of the events that took place pre-Synod 2018. Classis did not want conditional theology; the consistory of the former minister and the former minister himself did not want conditional theology. Synod judged that classis had failed to recognize and deal with doctrinal error, and then synod evaluated and corrected the error.

Even the preacher of the Jeremiah 23 sermon acknowledged this at the time. On August 19, 2018, he preached, “We thank God at the synod this year, the synod laid out the pure Reformed doctrine according to the confessions built upon the word of God.” Later he said, “I want to be clear here. I mentioned a minister’s name earlier in the sermon. I am not saying

that the minister is a wolf. Do not take that to be my meaning.”

Classis East, at her September 2018 meeting, confessed that she had erred in her decisions of January/February 2018, something that the since-deposed pastor also recognized, for on September 16, 2018, he preached, “Classis East said, ‘We erred. We erred when we did those things back in January and February. That was a mistake. That was wrong of us to do those things and take those decisions.’ Thank God, thank God that the Protestant Reformed Churches are working hard to correct the mistake that we have made. That’s a cause for great thanksgiving.”

Significantly, *in the prayer* after that sermon this same preacher said, before the face of God, thus acknowledging that the PRC did not *willfully and intentionally* compromise the gospel, “We thank Thee...that the churches have identified the error, have set it forth clearly, that Classis East has identified error and rejected it.... We love the gospel. We love it. *We have never meant to* compromise it. Forgive us, Father.” While the error preached by the former pastor compromised the gospel, neither that man, nor his consistory, nor Classis East intended to do so. Intention is always key when determining whether or not a man is a heretic.

In another sermon, the matter of intention exposes the since-deposed pastor’s exegesis and application of Galatians 1 as flawed. The heretics who troubled the churches of Galatia willfully perverted the truth. To say, as he did, in his sermon in September 2018, “Our churches have committed the worst sin that a church can commit. What is that sin? We compromised the gospel of Jesus Christ,” and then to apply Galatians 1 to that situation, is inappropriate. In Galatians 1:7 Paul warned the churches, “There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” That word “would” indicates intention: “There are some who *want to* pervert the gospel” or “there are some who *will to* pervert the gospel” is the idea. No one in the Protestant Reformed Churches, whether the former pastor, his consistory, or Classis East willed or wanted to pervert the gospel. When the error was pointed out, when the implications of the statements made were explained, the preacher who made those statements reacted appropriately: “I never meant to teach *that!*” Of course, that will be the reaction of a man who loves the truth, but who has inadvertently preached that which is false. Such a man, who submits to all ecclesiastical admonitions and works with all ecclesiastically-appointed committees, is not a heretic, although he might be, as in this case, judged unsuitable for the ministry due to his lack of aptitude to teach. Therefore, he was, with the

approval of Classis East and the concurrence of the synodical deputies, released under Article 12 of the Church Order, not deposed under Articles 79-80.

### Creating a false narrative

Those who spearheaded the schism have ratcheted up the rhetoric, alleging, first, that the gospel was *deliberately corrupted* in the PRC, and, second, that the error was *minimized and covered up*. The now-deposed pastor, in his sermon on Jeremiah 23, accused a former editor of the *SB* of minimizing the error exposed at Synod 2018. But he knows that the editorial in question said, “The issue was doctrinal, and it was significant. Synod judged that statements in a minister’s sermons were wrong. However, synod did not declare this error to be heresy.” He knows that the editor urged the members of the PRC to study the decisions. He knows, but failed to point out in his sermon, that the former editor in response to two follow-up letters reiterated the seriousness of the error. The schismatics are offended because the former editor refused, rightly so, following the judgment of synod, to call the error “heresy” or the former minister a heretic. That is because the Reformed faith has a careful definition of heresy and heretic, which do not fit in this case.

Rhetoric such as “the devil’s theology” and “the lie from the pit of hell” sound more exciting than the more careful and accurate “this error gives a place and function to our good works that is out of harmony with the confessions.” But be warned, falsifying a man’s words by sinfully representing what he said in order to justify schism is a serious transgression of the ninth commandment.

False accusations of “devil’s theology” and “works principle” are only the beginning. Ratcheting up the rhetoric against the Protestant Reformed Churches, the schismatic leader now calls the Protestant Reformed Churches, her pastors and elders, and the schools that our people support “the whore,” “vipers and murderers,” and “snares of Satan.”

Take, for example, our good Christian schools. The schismatics have now taken the position that, because the schools require parents and students not to militate against the schools, but to promise to use a lawful process if they have grievances, parents who give such assurances are guilty of placing an institution *above the truth*. Although the schools have always required this of all parents who wished to enroll their children in the schools, this is now labeled “a grievous snare,” something the leaders of the schism failed to see, so that their failure to blow the trumpet supposedly put their people in grave danger. In grave danger of not being permitted

to tell one’s classmates that they belong to the whore?! In grave danger of having to do all things decently and in order?!

To make sure that the members of the schism understand that militating against the schools is a *must*, the now-deposed pastor loudly proclaimed that the PRC are the whore, even the whore of Babylon. This led to another speech, in which the warning was given, “We are at a crossroads.” (By the way, that rhetoric is important and frequent: they are often at a “crossroads;” in other words, be careful, for this is the point of no return. That is how you make sure that the people follow you further into schism and radicalism. It is impossible, unless God is gracious, for such a man and his followers to back down.)

Although some were undoubtedly taken aback by such language, they were warned, “You must go that far [to call the PRC the whore]” and “If we draw back [from that confession], *we* become the whore.” By such propaganda people are manipulated so that they react in fear: the schismatic leaders appeal to people’s fear that the gospel is being lost; that they might be cut off in their generations if they stay in the PRC; that they might be swallowed up in God’s judgments which will come, sooner or later, upon Babylon; or simply that they might miss out on God’s supposed reformation of His church.

### Faulty exegesis and Scripture-twisting

The outlandish claim that the PRC denomination is a whore comes from a faulty exegesis of the Old Testament prophets that makes, not willful, persistent idolatry but *any doctrinal departure* the equivalent of the whorish worship of Baal. The departure of which the PRC are supposedly guilty is this: “There is something that man must perform which in his experience must come before the activity of Jehovah,” and “The moment man’s activity, no matter how he came to that activity [that is, even if God graciously works it in him], comes before the activity of God, there you have a prerequisite.” The point is not proven, just asserted. The PRC have not embraced conditions in the covenant, unless the schismatics’ novel redefinition of conditions is accepted.

Solomon did not teach “the devil’s theology” when he placed man’s repentance before the reception and experience of mercy: “He that forsaketh [his sins] *shall* have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). David did not teach “the lie from hell” when he taught the church to sing, “I acknowledged my sin...and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5). Fact is, and the since-deposed former pastor should know this, a condition is something that man must perform *on which salvation de-*

*pend*s. Whether man's activity *precedes* the reception of a blessing of God or not is *not decisive* in identifying it as a condition.

The leaders of the schism are deliberately burning all the bridges, undermining the schools in the minds of the people (separating children and young people from their friends, thus distressing the lambs of the flock), maligning the PRC and their ceremonies, and warning people not to "join themselves to the whore" in hearing the preaching, attending the baptisms, confessions of faith, and more in the PRC. As for the ministers of the PRC, they are called vipers and murderers, because the schismatic leader tries to draw a parallel between the scribes and Pharisees of Matthew 23 and the former colleagues of the now-deposed schismatic; and tries to argue that lawfully deposing a man for public schism is the same thing as stoning him to death. Again, if you claim something with enough rhetorical flourish, many people will not examine your assumptions, which do not flow from solid exegesis, but are based upon a sinful misrepresentation of the neighbor and a shameful twisting of God's holy Word.

## Conclusion

I cannot predict what the next step in the rhetorical

ratchet will be (we have already been called the departing/apostatizing church; but now we must be called the apostate, false church, the very Babylon from which all believers with their children must flee), but the rhetoric, without substance, will continue. We should *not* respond in kind, as tempting as it is. Sinful invective has no place on the Christian's tongue or on his pen. But we should not be naive either: we should see through the rhetoric and teach our young people and children to see through the rhetoric, lest they, too, be deceived by it.

The leaders of the schism are eloquent and gifted; how tragic, therefore, to see their gifts being used to destroy the church that they once professed to love. Let us "with all lowliness, and meekness, with longsuffering, [forbear] one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3). Let us "be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (I Pet. 3:8-9). Let us pray for the repentance of our dear brothers and sisters who walk in this grievous sin of schism, many of whom are deceived by such sinful rhetoric. And let us open our hearts, lives, and churches to any who express desire for reconciliation with us.



## Search the Scriptures

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

# A greater than Jonah

**The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.**

**Matthew 12:41**

**The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.**

**Luke 11:32**

It is impossible to tell the story of Jonah without taking account of Jesus' words concerning Himself in Matthew 12:41 where He calls Himself "a greater than Jonah." Greater indeed than Jonah, Christ is a greater sign as

well as a greater person, a greater prophet and a greater Savior, and His work in saving the cruel and wicked citizens of present-day Nineveh is ever so much greater than Jonah's work in ancient Nineveh.

We have already seen that the comparison Jesus makes between Himself and Jonah does not make Jonah a type of Christ. It was Jonah's disobedience that brought him low, but Christ's three days in the belly of the earth were part of His perfect obedience by which He made atonement for sin. Rather, Jonah's three days and his deliverance thereafter are a sign, a miracle of grace, that speaks of God's gracious and sovereign salvation. Jesus, calling Himself a greater than Jonah, is not identifying Himself as the fulfillment of a type, therefore, but emphasizing the truth that He and His deliverance are a greater miracle or sign than the mir-



acle of the deliverance Jonah brought to Nineveh: they were both signs, the one greater than the other.

Jesus is greater because He is *the* sign or miracle of salvation, a miracle that was only dimly foreshadowed in Jonah. Jesus is greater than the mere fallible man whose story is recorded in the Word of God. Jesus is the Son of God, the One come in our flesh, who does by His finished work what Jonah himself needed. Jesus makes atonement for sin and is a substitute for all our disobedience, Jonah's too. Jesus is greater as the One who not only preached through Jonah to the Ninevites but as the One who gave them faith and repentance unto life. I Peter 1:10, 11 show that it was the Spirit of Christ who spoke through Jonah, as through all the prophets, and in that way, especially, Christ is greater than Jonah.

Jonah, though reluctantly, was a living sermon to the Ninevites, a sermon that spoke of God's salvation and that effectively called the people of Nineveh to repentance. Jesus, in His person and work, is a similar gospel sermon to all who hear, but greater. He and His work are the *heart* of the gospel message. That is the comparison Christ is making in Matthew 12:41. Jonah preached in word and in his person the gospel of grace. Christ *is* the gospel of God's grace, as Paul says in I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Whether the people of Nineveh understood the promises of Christ as well as the Jews did in the Old Testament is uncertain, but they certainly saw the miracle of God's grace in Christ foreshadowed in Jonah and that was to them the gospel, the power of God unto salvation. What a remarkable testimony to the gospel their salvation is! Hearing it preached once and by the sign of the prophet Jonah it was nevertheless the means of their salvation, as it is always.

That power of the gospel is really the power of God in Christ who speaks through the gospel and who has chosen in His good pleasure to use it for salvation. What a shame, then, when all sorts of other nonsense is substituted for gospel preaching and the gospel itself set aside. What a shame when preachers think that their eloquence and pleading are the power of salvation. What a shame when those who hear the gospel demand smooth things instead of "yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed," or "repent and believe in Jesus Christ" for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

There is more, though, to what Jesus says. When He calls Himself a greater than Jonah, speaking to the hard-hearted Jews of His day, He refers especially to the time He was on earth, when by His words and miracles

He proved Himself to be the Son of God, the promised Messiah and the only Savior. In all that He was a sign to the Jews of His day who questioned His authority, rejected His preaching and miracles, called Him an ally of Beelzebub, and finally murdered Him.

He was a sign to His own generation as one greater than Jonah and He is that still today in the preaching of the gospel. Woe to those who see that sign and do not repent when the story of God's miracle in Christ is told today. Surely the men of Nineveh will stand in judgment. They repented at the sign of the prophet Jonah, seeing only dimly the greater sign. Now that greater sign is blazed forth in all the world and men still do not believe. Woe to them, indeed! And woe to us when we do not humble ourselves before that sign and cover ourselves in the sackcloth and ashes of sincere repentance, for that sign says still today, whether we see it in Jonah or in Christ Himself, that God is a just judge, but also merciful and gracious.

Jesus is greater than Jonah in His perfect obedience. Jonah's disobedience and conversion became part of the sign that God used to save the people of Nineveh, but Christ's perfect obedience was the substitute for all the former wickedness and violence of those people and His obedience unto death the atonement that paid for their wickedness. In that too Jesus is the greater sign.

Jesus is also a greater prophet than Jonah. He is the Prophet of whom Moses spoke: "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22, 23). He is the Prophet whose word is effectual and powerful. He is the One whose Spirit spoke through Jonah and made his preaching powerful and saving. He is the One who still speaks today through the preaching of the Word and who must be heard!

He is greater than Jonah also in His response to those who do believe and repent. Jonah went outside the city and sulked. Christ says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). He receives all repentant Ninevites however violent and evil they may have been before He changed their hearts and humbled them.

Christ is greater than Jonah, too, in that after dying for our sins and rising again from the dead, He gave the blessings of the Jews to the Gentiles, especially the bless-

ing of the covenant and the promise of the covenant that God would continue to be their God and the God of their children. Jonah enjoyed those covenant blessings, but God did not give them to Nineveh through Jonah's work. And not long after Jonah's preaching there, perhaps in the next generation, Nineveh had returned to violence and idolatry and was not long after destroyed. Yet, through Christ God gave these blessings to the Gentiles in the New Testament.

Nineveh was not even incorporated into God's covenant people like the Gibeonites and other individuals who were saved out of the nations—Asenath, Zipporah, Ruth, Rahab, Uriah and many others. Yet that is part of the importance of Nineveh's salvation, for that too shows the greatness of Christ who breaks down the middle wall of partition: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph. 2:11-14).

When Jesus, speaking to His own generation, said, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with *this* generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here," He meant that the unbelief of the Jews was all the more wicked in light of Nineveh's repentance, for they had the witness of the Son of God, not that of a reluctant and sulking prophet. For their unbelief the gospel would be taken from them and given to the Gentiles, those Gentiles of whom the Ninevites were part, and in the judgment day Nineveh's repentance will be their well deserved condemnation.

Those words of Jesus continue to be fulfilled. Those Gentiles who have rejected Christ in the gospel, who have broken and despised God's covenant, who have had the testimony of the law and the prophets and through them have heard the preaching of Jonah, not humbling themselves before God in repentance, will also be condemned in the judgment day by the Ninevites.

And most surely, then, the men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment against us if we have neglected God's covenant, been apathetic under the preaching of the gospel, have gone on in our sins instead of repenting and have not believed the testimony, now completed and given us in Holy Scripture, of Him who is greater than Jonah. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall

be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48).

All this adds up to what the Word says in Hebrews 1:1-4, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." And, its application in 2:1-4, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"

Hugh Martin says: "Had Nineveh rejected Jonah, they might still have said, It is merely a crier of danger that we put away from us. But he that rejecteth Jesus, rejecteth One that can give repentance and forgiveness of sins." Truly the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment against this generation that has put the word of gospel so far away that it is scarcely remembered, and who, when they do hear it, meet it with indifference and apathy.

There are those who name the gospel call for repentance and faith, "duty faith" and "duty repentance," who think that the demand for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ somehow compromises the sovereign grace of God in salvation, but it is not so. The One who is greater than Jonah calls through the gospel and calls His own to Himself. So it was in Nineveh and so it is today. The gospel as the word through which Christ speaks and calls is its own power, the power of God unto salvation.

Jonah preached in Nineveh the necessity of repentance and faith. The gospel of Christ's coming requires that of us, even more so than Jonah's preaching in Nineveh. May we, no less guilty before God than the Ninevites, and remembering that we must stand with them in the judgment, hear not their testimony against us, but the testimony of Christ Himself that we are His and He ours. And under the gospel considering our sins, may we humble ourselves before the great Judge and say as the king of Nineveh did, "Who can tell if

God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” May we find the assurance that He will repent and turn away His anger in Christ who spent three days in the belly of the earth and then

came forth from a grave that could not hold Him (Acts 2:24). And let us, forgiven and redeemed, “cry mightily unto God...[and] turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.”



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

# Lamb

If you were a Jew in the Old Testament, you would have been familiar with the lamb. You would have chosen one for your family every year at Passover (Ex. 12:3). It would have been a perfect lamb with no blemishes, a male of the first year, taken away from suckling at its mother’s breast (Ex. 12:5; I Pet. 1:19). You would have looked at its snowy white wool and into its large brown eyes before taking a knife and letting out its blood with a stroke to the neck. The flesh of the lamb would then be roasted and eaten by the whole family, its blood struck on the door frame of the house (Ex. 12:7, 8).

The sacrifice of the lamb was so common in the Old Testament (every morning and every evening of every day! Ex. 29:39) that we in the New testament might not appreciate the sense of unfairness and tragedy that came with each death. The lamb is the picture of vulnerability and gentleness, which is why it is so shocking to think of them lying in peace next to hungry lions and wolves in the kingdom to come (Is. 11:6, 65:25). The lamb is white, snowy innocence, which is why David was so outraged when he heard of the rich man sparing “to take of his own flock” and instead making a feast out of “the poor man’s lamb” (II Sam. 12:4). A lamb is for gently gathering up in the arms of the shepherd (Is. 40:11), not for leading off to the slaughter (Is. 53:7)!

Ah, but the Lord God was making a salient point when he called His people to sacrifice the lamb. He *wanted* them to feel that sense of unfairness and tragedy. He wanted His people to walk away from the altar with a tremble in their step. Could a man sacrifice a lamb, hear its feeble bleating, watch its blood run in the temple court, and *not* be touched in the deepest way? In the eyes of God, he may as well have cut off a dog’s neck or slain a man in cold blood as far as the condition of his heart is concerned (Is. 66:3). The Lord was communicating something important through the lamb, which

is the high cost of sin. Sin—whether the original sin in conception (Lev. 12:6), the sin of loathsome corruption like leprous flesh (Lev. 14:10), the sin of ignorance (Lev. 4:32), or the sin of knowledge (Lev. 6:6)—the high cost was a lamb without blemish and without spot. The innocent and the vulnerable for the violent and the guilty.

Yet for all the gentleness of thousands upon thousands of little lambs slain in the temple, not one of them really took away the sins of those who offered them (Heb. 10:4). The question of the believer in those days was always the question of Isaac walking by his father’s side up the hill of Moriah: “My father...behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And the answer to that question was always the answer of a father’s burdened heart: “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:7, 8).

God did provide Himself a lamb. It was not the ram that Abraham spotted in the thicket as Isaac lay bound on the altar beneath his quivering knife. It was a man of about thirty years old who walked openly into the circle of an astonished John the Baptist. Astonished John surely was, for he had waited his whole life for the moment when he could raise his finger to point out this very person and declare in the voice of a herald, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Like all lambs before Him, this Lamb too was led away to the slaughter with a silent mouth (Is. 53:7). With Him in His silent suffering were the names of every one written in His book as He made the sacrifice ordained by God from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and the wounds of our transgressions He accepted as His own. And therefore, the new song of praise resounding in the church forever is the song of heaven’s

triumph: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Rev. 5:12).

You see how apparent weakness is turned by God into strength and triumph. The Lamb that was slain is also the Lion of Judah’s tribe who prevailed to open the book that no other man even dared to look upon (Rev. 5:6). He is the Lamb whose blood overcomes the accuser of our brethren (Rev. 12:11), who destroys all who make war with Him because He is “Lord of lords, and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14). He is the Lamb who needs not soldiers to defend Him with sword and shield, but who sends His followers out instead as “lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). This is how you will wage my wars, says the Lamb-King: by giving attention “to the least of these my brethren” (Matt. 25:40). “Do you love

me?” says the risen Lamb to His disciple. This is how you will show it: “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).

In fact, this is the striking characteristic of all who follow the Lamb, that they begin to look just like Him. Not only do they wear robes that have been washed white in His blood (Rev. 7:14), but coming out of tribulation they love not their lives even unto death, and even lay them down for the sake of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). They have no fear to do so, for their great hope is not in the kingdom of a counterfeit lamb who speaks like a dragon (Rev. 13:11), but in their calling to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9). They look for the coming of a new world where no sun is necessary, for the Lamb is the light thereof (Rev. 21:23), and no temple, “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (Rev. 21:22).



## Go ye into all the world

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

# Protestant Reformed Missions Years of trial (4): Missions threatened (1947-1953)

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2021, p. 329.

After the synod of 1948, Protestant Reformed mission work among the Dutch immigrants in Canada who had been members of the Liberated Churches (LC) in the Netherlands became an obsession. The Mission Committee, First PRC (the calling church of our missionaries), and most of the membership of the PRC viewed this labor as most advantageous for church extension. There were a few who eyed this work with suspicion. Rev. George Ophoff was wary of the sharp doctrinal differences between the LC and the PRC on the covenant (conditional vs. unconditional). We devoted our last article to uncovering Ophoff’s objections to work among the Liberated as well as to the great divide that was developing among the clergy of the PRC.

In this article we will relate the events that rapidly took place between the years 1949 and 1950 and that led to the infamous split of 1953. Keep in mind that it is not my intention to give a complete history surrounding this event. Books have been written on that subject by those who have a greater knowledge of all the intricacies that led to this division.

It is merely my intent to examine these events from the viewpoint of the mission work taking place at that time in the PRC.

The direction of missions since the Synod of 1948 had been set. Despite the warnings of Ophoff and despite the fact that his protest that the two missionaries must labor together in the same field (namely, Lynden, WA, as Synod 1948 decided) was sustained by Synod 1949, the sights of the Mission Committee and First PRC were set on the immigrants in Canada. In November of 1948 the Mission Committee asked First PRC to consider sending a missionary to labor in Canada on the basis of a glowing report submitted by Revs. John DeJong and Hubert DeWolf. The Mission Committee was convicted that “work be continued there indefinitely to propagate the truth of God’s sovereign grace as entrusted to us” (Mission Committee Minutes, Nov. 13, 1948). First PRC did not accede to this request immediately. Instead, several Dutch-speaking ministers in the PRC were asked to preach for a group of families in Hamil-



ton, Ontario. This labor continued until in February of 1949 five families in Hamilton requested organization as a PRC church. This request was granted at the March 1949 meeting of the Mission Committee.

Requests of immigrants from the Liberated Churches (LC) were now coming in a steady stream to the Mission Committee. In January 1949 the Mission Committee was contacted by a family in Ridgetown, Ontario (about 120 miles from Hamilton) requesting that the PRC begin church services in his city. This was put on hold because of a lack of men and resources to do the work. By May 1949 the various ministers sent to labor in Canada had made inroads into the area around Sarnia/Chatham, Ontario. A concentrated labor began there. In September 1949 the congregation in Redlands, CA sent a letter to the Mission Committee concerning mission work among the immigrants in Bellflower, CA. This was referred to the Bellflower consistory for further information. During the October 1949 meeting a letter was received from the consistory of Manhattan, Montana PRC and several families from Leithbridge, Alberta asking for information about our churches and a visit with a view to starting a church there. The Mission Committee asked the Manhattan consistory to make this visit and continue the work there. At the same meeting correspondence from an immigrant in St. Eugene, Ontario was read and received for information. By the time the Synod of 1950 met, our missionary had investigated interested groups in Edmonton and Barrhead/Neerlandia in Alberta and London, Ontario. Mission work in the PRC was at an all-time high! Never before had there been so many requests for the establishment of PR churches!

But there was a dark cloud overshadowing all this work among the Dutch immigrants: they were from the LC where Schilder's view of the conditional covenant was deeply entrenched. What began as a matter of discussion in our churches with Schilder's visit in 1947, by 1949-50 had become a matter of true versus false doctrine. Some among the ministers and members of the PR churches believed that the doctrines of the unconditional covenant and the conditional covenant could exist side by side with each other since the confessions said nothing about this issue. Others were persuaded that Schilder's view of the conditional covenant was correct. Still others strongly maintained the unconditional covenant to be the truth of Scripture and the confessions. A deep doctrinal division was quickly developing in the PR denomination.

But who could stop the flow? Our churches were now swiftly carried along in the rapids of excitement for growth—from small and despised to large and re-

spected. The doctrinal division did not reveal itself in the minutes of the Mission Committee or of First PRC. It was there, but it did not seem to hinder our mission program from reaching out and establishing churches among those who were convicted of the error of the conditional covenant. Upon a glowing report of Rev. H. Hoeksema, a congregation was organized, as was mentioned, in Hamilton, Ontario the third week in April 1949. Rev. H. Veldman accepted the call as pastor to this congregation in the winter of 1949. By March 1950 Chatham, Ontario was also organized into a PRC in Canada.

So much emphasis was placed on our work among the Dutch-speaking immigrants in Canada that our English-speaking missionaries were becoming obsolete. It was not as if they had no more labors to perform. As per the mandate of Synod 1948, they continued to labor in the Lynden/Sumas, WA area for a time. But Rev. E. Knott complained to the Mission Committee that "further labor in this field is useless" (MC Minutes of February 1949, Art. 6). After that he was used by the Mission Committee to fill the pulpits of those Dutch-speaking ministers released from their congregations to preach in Canada. Knott was also sent to various places in the U.S. to investigate possible fields of labor. The minutes reveal that he visited New Sharon, IA, South Dakota, and Engelwood near Chicago. However, nothing materialized in these areas. Knott was called back to Grand Rapids to pursue correspondence with various contacts. Finally, the missionaries reported to the Mission Committee, "as to the present positions of Revs. Hofman and Knott, they feel that they should be morally free to receive and consider a call at any time" (MC Minutes of December 1949, Art. 14). As we mentioned at the close of our last installment, within the next few months both of them received calls into our churches.

During this time, the need for a Dutch-speaking missionary was strongly felt. In July 1949, as per the instruction of synod of that year, a call was extended to Rev. John DeJong, a frequent laborer in Canada, to become our missionary to the Dutch immigrants there. First PRC reported to the Mission Committee at its August meeting that DeJong received an extension to his call until his return from the Netherlands where he was vacationing along with Rev. B. Kok at the time. On the surface of things this seemed perfectly innocent. Ministers have asked for extensions on calls for that reason. But, again, do not forget the dark shadow of doctrinal controversy lay heavy over the churches. Kok and DeJong were not an official delegation sent to the Netherlands by the PRC. They were there for personal reasons. It seems that Kok and DeJong, without the knowledge

of our churches, decided to have a meeting with representatives from the Liberated Churches (LC) while in the Netherlands. This became public knowledge in our churches in a round-about way. While preaching in Chatham one weekend Ophoff (of all people!) read a letter that was sent to one of the immigrants in that congregation from Prof. Holwerda, a professor in the LC. We quote the first paragraph:

I received your letter yesterday, and a direct reply per airmail is in order. Day before yesterday we held a meeting with Rev. Kok and Rev. DeJong, the purpose being mutual discourse. We had a wholly openhearted exchange of thoughts. They said this: Indeed, we have much to be grateful for to Rev. Hoeksema. But his conception regarding election, etc., is not church doctrine. No one is bound by it. Some are emitting a totally different sound by it. Their opinion was that most (of the Protestant Reformed) do not think as Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff. And sympathy for the Liberated was great also in the matter of their doctrine of the covenant. They do accentuate differently in America, considering their history, but for the conception of the Liberated there is ample room....<sup>1</sup>

Mind you, all of this was taking place while DeJong had the call as missionary to Canada! Ophoff was livid! He published the matter in an article of the *Standard Bearer* for which he later apologized. But it did not matter: the divide in our churches was quickly coming to a head. Yet, when reading the minutes of the Mission Committee it was business as usual. DeJong declined the call as missionary. A call was then extended to Rev. A. Cammenga and he accepted that call in October of 1949.

Now, however, the PRC's position on the unconditional covenant was solidifying. Those in the PRC who opposed the doctrine of the unconditional covenant were becoming vocal. Rev. A. Petter began a series of articles in the *Concordia* that strongly agreed with the Liberated view of the covenant. This, in turn, fired up an exchange of articles between the *Standard Bearer* (Ophoff and others) and the *Concordia* over the issue of the covenant. The same debate was carried on between Hoeksema and Schilder in the *Standard Bearer* and *De Reformatie*, the periodical of the LC in the Netherlands. The doctrinal positions were now clearly defined. But, because there was such strong disagreement in the PRC over the doctrine of the covenant, the immigrants in Canada were confused and increasing-

ly wary of joining the PRC. They were convinced the covenant was conditional and if the PRC maintained that it was unconditional they would seek affiliation elsewhere. The Mission Committee was receiving letters from these immigrants asking us what our official position on the covenant was. They needed an answer.

The Mission Committee decided at its August 8, 1949 meeting "to request Rev. H. Hoeksema to prepare a brief and concise testimonial concerning our position as Protestant Reformed on the covenant, to be published in pamphlet form" (Mission Committee Minutes, Art. 15). Search as I did, I never found anything that indicates this request to Hoeksema was made, much less, carried out. The reason for this remains a mystery. But at the Mission Committee meeting in April 1950 the following was decided:

A motion was made that in our report to synod we recommend that synod give expression as to what is binding for membership in our churches.

Grounds:

- 1) The execution of our work as a Mission Committee and of our missionaries requires this since we have received numerous requests from immigrants about this matter.
- 2) We as a Mission Committee have no right to make such a declaration for our churches.

After some discussion this is tabled until the next meeting.<sup>2</sup>

This decision was made upon the recommendation of our missionary A. Cammenga. "It was Cammenga who asked the mission committee for a statement of the scriptural doctrine of God's covenant of grace which he could take with him in his mission work with the immigrants who came mostly from the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands."<sup>3</sup>

The tabled motion of the April meeting was not taken from the table at the next meeting but must have been approved (with different wording) when the Mission Committee approved the report that the secretary, Rev. C. Hanko prepared for the Synod of 1950. We will treat the request of the Mission Committee to that synod in our next article together with the Declaration of Principles the 1950 Synod adopted provisionally as the official view of the PRC regarding the unconditional covenant.

<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Hoeksema, *A Watered Garden* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1992), 149.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Mission Committee, April 11, 1950, Article 11.

<sup>3</sup> G. Hoeksema, *A Watered Garden*, 161.



## Strength of youth

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

# The pity party

**Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.**

**Jeremiah 45:3**

Each one of us has experienced this before. Taking on a victim mentality, we crab and we pout about the hurt others have caused us. We become downcast and despondent because one after another circumstance, or so it seems, has piled up against us. Navel-gazing, we take on the doom and gloom mindset, crying silently within as Jacob of old, “All these things are against me” (Gen. 42:36b). Or as described by the scribe of Jeremiah named Baruch, we murmur, “Woe is me!”

Regarding this sensitive topic, we must clarify. Pity itself, of course, is not wrong. In fact, we ought to cherish *God’s* compassion toward us! With lamenting Jeremiah, we find relief in the Lord’s sympathy toward us during our suffering: “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22). We ultimately depend on Jehovah’s loving pity upon us.

As we value His compassion toward us, we will show that same love to others. Paul explains in I Corinthians 12:26 that this will be true of members united to the same body of Christ: “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.” How good and necessary it is when our Christian fellowship includes expressions of pity for hurting members in the church. Such are reflections of our merciful God. Implied, then, is the propriety of not only showing pity but also receiving it. Humble reception of sympathy from others is a beautiful benefit of the communion of the saints. Receiving pity in and of itself is not sinful; rather, pity of this kind is God’s gracious gift to His beloved church.

However, self-pity is sinful. It is the selfish turning of pity “inside-out,” or more precisely, “outside-in.” Focused upon self, the heart forgets God’s pity. Without cherishing God’s unfailing compassions, the empty heart craves others to join in his pity party, seeking pity

in all the wrong places (for example, the world’s social media). Instead of selflessly showing compassion to others who suffer, the heart turns inward and becomes fixated on “poor me.”

When was the last time you threw yourself such a personal pity party? The question is asked of *you*, dear reader, so that you might not accuse *others* of such but so that you might examine *yourself* regarding the matter. Has your mind been on these things? “Woe is me! My grades are no good, I don’t have any good friends, I lost again, my parents are unfair, people don’t understand me, death has visited, there is sickness I bear, government restrictions are so inconsistent, the leaders of country and state are so liberal, I’m so busy, tired, and stressed, and don’t get me started on all the problems in my church....” We sound a lot like Baruch: “Woe is me now! For the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, I find no rest” (Jer. 45:3).

Proper sorrow is one thing; a pity party is another. When we trap ourselves in this pity-party prison, the first thing we desire is the last thing we need. We do not need someone to join our bitter fest, encourage our pouting, and tell us we have every right to feel this way. Rather, we need someone with a gentle but firm spirit to show us the pity of Christ we need, and then confront us with our selfishness. The prophet Jeremiah, who himself had his difficulties with self-pity, came to Baruch, his struggling scribe, and said, “Thus saith the LORD; Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest” (Jer. 45:4-5). Baruch needed such a rebuke. And so do we.

God’s Word addresses our self-pity by calling us first to consider the doom and gloom of others. “I’m going to destroy the whole land and bring evil upon all flesh, and you’re thinking about yourself?” Dear reader, there is no denying that “many are the afflictions of the right-

teous” (Ps. 34:19). You may even suffer a greater degree of pain than others around you. Yet do not consider only your own suffering! Many of us mope about in middle class suburbia, the walls of our self-focus blocking from our mind spiritual brothers and sisters who endure far greater affliction than we can even imagine. We claim that our inconveniences kill us, while our fellow saints actually die for their faith. And more, we forget the misery of so many who live without the comfort of the gospel. So turn outward. Turn outward. That is the proper direction of your pity.

Secondly, God’s Word rebukes us for the pride of self-pity. Ironically, the reason we often feel so deflated is that we have too inflated a view of self. God rebukes Baruch: “Seekest thou great things for thyself?” When we say, “Poor me,” we often include quietly, “I deserve better than this.” We need someone to remind us of the Reformed truth we often forget to apply to ourselves. A totally depraved sinner (yes, I refer to our remaining old man affecting all our thinking, willing, feeling, and doing) deserves nothing good. In fact, sinners like you and me deserve far worse than all the afflictions we endure. We are not mainly victims of others’ sins but chief perpetrators of sin. Our self-pity is another sin that proves this. So bend humbly. Bend humbly. That is the proper posture when the pride of self-pity is exposed.

In the third place, God addresses our self-pity with

the truth of the gospel. Although we deserve all things to be against us, God gave up His Son. He showed great compassion to us, by causing His only begotten Son to endure the punishment we deserve: far greater suffering than we pity ourselves for and endure today. What we suffer today cannot even be compared to what He already suffered in our place. And now, God promises with His Son freely to give us all things: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). With great compassion, God works all things for the good of His people in Jesus Christ. So recognize His pity. Recognize *His* pity. That is the only antidote to self-pity.

In light of that gospel, the sin of our pity party is exposed even more. “Woe is me” is not true. “All these things are against me” is false. When we pity ourselves, we reject His compassion. We ignore the gospel. We claim that Jesus from whom all blessings flow is not enough. Instead of celebrating His grace, we throw our party of ingratitude and unbelief.

Yet His compassions still fail not. So great is His pity that He forgives us of all the selfishness, pride, and unbelief of our self-pity, all for Jesus’ sake. So believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus.

Once upon a time, a man named Baruch said, “Woe is me.” But his own name contradicted his words. Baruch means “blessed.” Let us learn from his name to confess, “Blessed am I.”

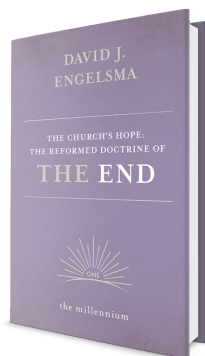


## Bring the books...

Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor of Unity Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan

*The Church’s Hope: The Reformed Doctrine of the End (Volume One: The Millennium)*, by Prof. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: RFP). \$29.95 soft. 350 pages. Reviewed by Rev. Garry Eriks.

The clear message of this volume on eschatology is the church’s hope that Jesus Christ is coming again to bring His church to live with Him in body and soul forever. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs this



hope because of the attacks upon her and the hardships she faces in an increasingly wicked world. From beginning to end Prof. Engelsma warmly reminds the church of her hope. The book is not simply written to identify false teachings in the church today (which it does with a bold voice), or to explain the truth of amillennialism (which it does clearly), but it is written to give the church hope.

This message of hope is addressed in all the major sections the book, which cover the main subjects of Reformed eschatology. The first section explains the hope found in the end or goal of all history, which is



the coming of Christ to bring the church to Himself. In the second main section, Prof. Engelsma encourages the reader with the hope of the intermediate state, which is the state of the soul of the child of God after death and before Christ's return. The hope for the child of God is that our soul will be with Christ in heaven. In the rest of the book, Prof. Engelsma explains the millennium of Revelation 20, after which he defends Reformed amillennialism against the errors of postmillennialism and premillennialism. He exposes how postmillennialism and premillennialism rob of the child of God of true, biblical hope. Our hope is found in the victory of Christ that is explained in the biblical and Reformed truth of amillenialism.

Because Prof. Engelsma writes for the practical purpose of giving the church hope, this is a book for all members of the church to read. Those who read the book will be rewarded with growth in their understanding of eschatology and with a hope that is renewed because of what Christ is accomplishing until the day of His return.

There are many other qualities that characterize this book. This volume is confessional and scriptural. Prof. Engelsma roots his conclusions in the Reformed confessions and careful exegesis of Scripture. He refers throughout the book to the rich Reformed tradition handed down to the church today in the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, Canons of Dordt, Westminster Confession, and the Second Helvetic Confession. Thus the book is clearly and distinctively Reformed. Not only does the writer look back at the Reformed tradition, but he provides careful exegesis of many of the passages in the Old Testament and in the New Testament to expose what is false and to prove what is truth.

As you would expect from Prof. Engelsma, he dissects with strict precision and relentless thoroughness the evil errors in each of the main sections of the book. What is especially valuable is his careful explanation of and analysis of the errors of postmillennialism and premillennialism. Explaining the various nuances of these errors can be extremely difficult, but the author does this well. If you want a better understanding of these errors in the church world, read the book. With

precision, the author wields the scalpel of the Scriptures and confessions to demonstrate thoroughly these evil errors that threaten the church. For him, it is not simply a matter of being right according to Scripture. He warns the church of these errors with a pastor's heart, wanting the church to find hope in Christ and His victory. He clearly demonstrates how Satan uses the errors to draw the church away from the hope and victory of Christ.

Prof. Engelsma does not merely regurgitate what the church in the past has said. This volume develops the truth of eschatology. He provides fresh exegesis of pertinent passages and a confessional defense of Reformed eschatology. Read the book because you will find rich insights into eschatology. This includes even critiquing Herman Hoeksema, who is loved in

the Protestant Reformed Churches, concerning an aspect of his view on Revelation 20. This demonstrates that the author is not simply a follower of men, but one who must submit to the authority of God's Word. The reader should not be alarmed at this. Prof. Engelsma does also praise one of the greatest devotionals on the book of Revelation, *Behold He Cometh*, written by Hoeksema.

ten by Hoeksema.

The Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed church world are indebted to Prof. Engelsma for writing this volume, which arises out of his many years of studying, teaching, and preaching on the return of Jesus Christ. I am thankful personally, as a pastor, for this volume on Reformed eschatology. It is polemical, confessional, biblical, Christ-centered, and hope filled. May the Lord use this work to bless Reformed churches until the day of our Savior's return.

**Because Prof. Engelsma writes for the practical purpose of giving the church hope, this is a book for all members of the church to read. Those who read the book will be rewarded with growth in their understanding of eschatology and with a hope that is renewed because of what Christ is accomplishing until the day of His return.**

## BOOK SALE!

*Justified unto Liberty:*

*Commentary on*

*Galatians*

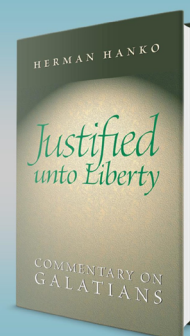
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## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question:

What emeritus ministers are still active in preaching and teaching in the PRC? (Answer at the end of this news report.)

### PRC news (Denominational)

- The churches in Classis East marked a special day of prayer on November 2, and some in Classis West observed the same. The reason given for the service was: “Our churches are experiencing great affliction at the present.... This great affliction is evidenced by the ongoing schism that has torn apart the body of Christ, the great need that we as a denomination have for ministers of the Word, and other ongoing afflictions as well” (decision of Classis East in Sept. 2021). It is our prayer that the time spent in God’s house that night was profitable for the saints and glorifying to our God. And may the Lord hear our cries and answer our requests.

#### Minister calls:

On October 3 **Rev. R. Kleyn** was installed as the tenth pastor in the history of First PRC-Grand Rapids, MI. Prof. C. Griess, her previous pastor, led the installation service and in the evening pastor Kleyn preached his first sermon in his new congregation.

On October 10 **Rev. D. Lee** (former pastor of the now disbanded Bethel PRC) accepted the call to Kalamazoo PRC. He was installed by Prof. C. Griess on November 7. We rejoice with Rev. Lee and Kalamazoo PRC in God’s gracious guidance and provision.

On October 10 **Rev. R. Barnhill** (Peace PRC, Dyer, IN) declined the call from Covenant of Grace PRC (Spokane, WA). Her new trio was made up of Revs. D. Holstege (PRC missionary to the Philippines), D. Noorman (SW-PRC), and C. Spronk (Faith PRC). On October 24 the congregation issued a call to Rev. Spronk.

On October 17 **Rev. E. Guichelaar** declined the calls he had received from Doon PRC and Hudsonville PRC.

After her reorganization as a congregation and consistory (September 26), **Wingham PRC** began the process of calling a new pastor. The Council announced

a new trio of Revs. D. Holstege, D. Kleyn, and D. Lee. On October 24 she extended a call to Rev. Holstege.

#### Seminary:

The Spring issue of the *PRT Journal* is now available in its digital forms on the seminary’s website ([www.prc.ts.org/journal](http://www.prc.ts.org/journal)) and in print. If you wish to pick up a copy, stop in at the seminary. If you want to be added to our mailing list, contact Sharon Kleyn, the seminary secretary ([seminarysecretary@prca.org](mailto:seminarysecretary@prca.org)).

### Protestant Reformed Theological Journal

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- Last month the **Reformed Witness Hour** ([reformedwitnesshour.org](http://reformedwitnesshour.org)) celebrated a significant milestone in her history. This notice went out from the RWH Committee: *With thankfulness to God, the Reformed Witness Hour Committee celebrates 80 years since the first broadcast of the RWH on October 12, 1941. Over 4,100 weekly programs have aired on radio, and more recently on Internet, in North America and abroad during these years. We thank the people of our churches who faithfully have taken on the long-term commitment of praying and giving to support this radio ministry. We especially want to thank the pastors who have given of their time to produce the sermons for our broadcasts. Will you please pray that God will continue to use the RWH to glorify Himself, to gather His elect, and to build up His church worldwide?*

### PRC news (Congregational)

- The fall season brings the return of **Bible studies**

to the churches. What is your society studying this year? Here are a few samples of what others are doing: Calvary PRC—Romans; Faith PRC—Hebrews and Zechariah (led by Sem. Intern Marcus Wee); Hope PRC—GR—James and Jude; Hull PRC—Genesis; Pittsburgh PRC—II Timothy. May the study of God’s Word be precious to us in these days in which we live. “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (Ps.119:16).

- **Doon PRC** (NW Iowa) is currently undergoing a building addition. We hope to have more details next time.

- **Grace PRC** (Standale, MI): Now here’s a unique fundraiser! *Grace young people are holding a scrap metal drive from Oct. 30 to Nov. 20. Dumpster is available at Grace Church or call Scott Kooienga to arrange for pickup.* I think I might have some items in my garage. I wonder if they take old satellite dishes.

- **Hudsonville PRC** (MI) operates a small bookstore in downtown Hudsonville. The Reformed Book Outlet is open four days a week and you are welcome to shop in-store on those days. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday (10-5), and Saturday (10-1). Or you may place an order online by visiting their website at [www.reformedbookoutlet.com](http://www.reformedbookoutlet.com). With the holidays coming, this is a good time to pick up some gifts!



## Sister-Church news

- **PRC-Philippines:** The churches and mission are eagerly anticipating the delayed return of Rev. D. Holstege, his wife, and family from their furlough in the U.S. In a recent Provident PRC bulletin we find this welcome note: *Rev. and Sis. Leah Holstege and family have now received the necessary documents and permission from the Philippine Government to return to the Philippines. They are scheduled to return on Nov. 17, the Lord willing. Upon arrival, they will undergo a mandatory quarantine. Let us pray for them as they make preparations for their return.* We join the saints there in prayer for this. Are we remembering to pray for our other pastors there too?

- **Covenant ERC-Singapore:** Earlier this month our sister in Singapore held her annual Reformation Day remembrance. This was the notice as it appeared in her bulletin: *The Lord willing, we will be having our annual Reformation Day Conference on the 3rd and 4th of November. ...Based on the reformational principle of Semper Reformanda, which means, “Reformed and always reforming,” the theme of the 2021 RDC is “Always Reforming in Me.” The first speech is entitled, “The Word and Creeds in Me.” There, we would treat the question of how should God’s Word and the Reformed Confessions relate to our personal lives. In the second speech, “The Reformation Living in Me,” we will be looking at the life of Martin Luther and the Reformation, with the special focus on how we can live out the Reformation personally in our lives in our present-day to the glory of God.*

Are you familiar with the “Reformed News Asia” newsletter from the CERCS? If not, and you would like to subscribe, visit her website ([www.cerc.org.sg](http://www.cerc.org.sg)) and sign up!

- **Covenant PRC—N. Ireland:** Don’t forget to read each issue (monthly) of the “Covenant Reformed News”! You may find it on the PRC website under the news section ([www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)) as well as on CPRC’s website: [cprc.co.uk](http://cprc.co.uk)

## Food for thought:

“It is not only the sum and substance of the preceding doctrine, but the meaning of almost the whole gospel, that we are to depart from sin; and yet, though we are always exposed to God’s judgment, we are certain that Christ so intercedes by the sacrifice of his death, that the Father is propitious to us. In the meantime, he also anticipates an objection, lest any one should think that he gave license to sin when he spoke of God’s mercy, and shewed that it is presented to us all. He then joins together two parts of the gospel, which unreasonable men separate, and thus lacerate and mutilate.”

~ John Calvin on I John 2:1  
(Found in a recent Loveland PRC bulletin)

## Trivia Answer:

Six of our emeritus ministers are busy preaching/teaching: Revs. M. DeVries, Prof. D. Engelsma, R. Hanco, K. Koole, T. Miersma, and J. Slopeema. We thank God for their labors, even as we thank the Lord for all of our emeritus pastors and professors.



## Announcements

### Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Jeff and Sara Potjer in the death Jeff's mother, **Mary Potjer**, who died at the age of 78. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

Rev. D. Noorman, President  
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Bob (Kathy) Looyenga, Randy (Lindy) Looyenga, and Doug (Melissa) Looyenga in the death their mother, **Theresa Looyenga**, who died at the age of 91. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. D. Noorman, President  
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

### Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathies to David and Amy Ondersma and Kevin and Sally Timmerman and their children in the death of their father and grandfather, **David Ondersma Sr.** It is our prayer that they and his extended family may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Rev. Carl Haak, President  
Kevin Timmerman, Assistant Clerk

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathies to Carl Potjer, and Russ and Lisa Potjer and their children in the death of their wife, mother, and grandmother, **Mary Potjer**. It is our prayer that they and their extended family may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in Revelation 14:13 "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Rev. Carl Haak, President  
Kevin Timmerman, Assistant Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC extends our Christian sympathy to Clarence Vlietstra and Doug and Sarah Vlietstra with their children Caleb and Emma and all who mourn her loss, in the passing of **Joanne Vlietstra**. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25, 26).

Steve DeVries, Vice President  
Tom Verbeek, Clerk

### Teacher needed

Heritage Christian High School (Dyer, IN) is seeking three full-time teachers in the English, Mathematics, and Social Studies Departments for the 2022-2023 school year. Please contact our administrator, Ralph Medema, [ralph.medema@heritagechs.org](mailto:ralph.medema@heritagechs.org) or 219.730.9876.