

# The Standard Bearer

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A rod out of the stem of Jesse

Rev. John Marcus

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

Prof. Brian Huizinga

The Texas Heartbeat Act;  
The dangers of TikTok

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The Supreme Court  
rules unanimously in  
favor of religious liberty

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Covenant, missions,  
and antithesis

Rev. Daniel Holstege



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## Meditation

Rev. John Marcus, a minister of the Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# A rod out of the stem of Jesse

**And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots....**

**Isaiah 11:1**

The mighty Assyrian empire had already conquered the northern kingdoms of Syria and Israel at the time of this prophecy; now it was threatening Judah. Assyria with her ruthless and invincible armies had conquered one nation after another. From a human perspective, Judah appeared to be doomed.

Today, the antichristian kingdom goes about to establish itself. It manifests its agenda in greater and greater wickedness. It shows its hatred of God and the church more and more clearly. Satan assails the church from without and from within in a multitude of ways. We wonder how the church will stand against all her foes.

Near-sighted human eyes might not see the victory. Weak hands and feeble knees might make us imagine the war is lost. The church may seem so small and insignificant and the enemies so great. But God will obtain a glorious victory.

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A desolate stump!

This is the picture of the lowly “rod out of the stem of Jesse.” The lowly stump is called the stem of *Jesse* because it represents the royal house of David that grew out of Jesse’s lineage. This emphasizes its lowliness, in the first place, because Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth (a Moabitess!) and hailed from the little town of Bethlehem. In the second place, the fact that the prophecy refers to a *stump* indicates that it was once a tree that had grown out of Jesse’s line. God took David from watching sheep and made him a mighty conquering king, who ruled over all the tribes of Israel and even extended her boundaries from the river Euphrates to the river of Egypt. There was a time in Israel’s history when the tree of David’s kingdom seemed vigorous and strong.

However, already in David’s time the tree had become sickly owing to his own sins. Solomon’s marriages to ungodly wives marred the tree further. When Re-

hoboam took the throne, the tree was disfigured even more as ten tribes were removed. Ungodly kings that followed continued to damage the tree. King Ahaz, to whom Isaiah prophesied, was so wicked he sacrificed more than one of his children in the fire. Even though Judah would escape Assyria’s clutches in Ahaz’ day, Babylon would arise some 120 years later and destroy Jerusalem and the temple and take the people captive. From that captivity, only a handful of people would return to Jerusalem.

The stump of Jesse would lie dormant from then until the time of the New Testament. Judah was never again her own sovereign state, but was always under the rule of others. During that time, the worship of God devolved more and more into mere formality. How painful for the prophets to see the royal house of David reduced to such a condition.

From a human perspective it appeared that nothing would ever come from such a desolate stump. How often has God brought His saints to the same place where all seems hopeless and we wonder how good can come of it!

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But God brings forth a tender branch!

Thanks be to God that the desolate stump was not the end of the story. What appears hopeless in our eyes does not hinder God from performing His will in the least. Indeed, God uses those very things to accomplish His purposes. He chooses the foolish things to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the things that are mighty (I Cor. 1:27). In those very times, we are brought to confess, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

The text is a promise of victory! “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” Out of the stump of Jesse, which was level to the ground and seemingly dead, God would bring forth a lowly rod, a small insignificant-looking twig. Out of the roots, God would cause a tender shoot to sprout.

Although the stump of Jesse would lie dormant for

centuries, it would bring forth the Branch, in whom is our salvation. A tiny little bud would develop into a small green shoot. What could such a little, despised branch accomplish? Ah, but that branch pictures Christ.

The Hebrew word translated “branch” is *netzer*, related to the name Nazareth. Matthew tells of the prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene, which prophecy was fulfilled in connection with His growing up and living in the town of Nazareth (cf. Matt. 2:23). When Philip announced that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, Nathanael responded with the prevailing view of Nazareth: “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). So it was that Jesus of Nazareth, the Branch, would be considered “a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (Ps. 22:6). He would be “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Is. 53:3).

Jesus, the despised Branch, experienced rejection already at the time of His birth, when no room was made for Him in the inn. He was despised by King Herod, who killed the infants of Bethlehem in an attempt to get rid of Him. He was despised by the people of His own hometown as they tried to throw Him off a cliff. He was despised by the Jews, who had aspirations for an earthly kingdom. He was despised by the Jewish leaders, who declared Him worthy of death for confessing that He was the Son of God. He was despised by the Roman leader, who thought his own position as governor was more important than justice.

As they despised Jesus, they nailed Him to the accursed cross, upon which He experienced the greatest despising of all. The wonder of the gospel is that Jesus of Nazareth was despised and rejected for our sakes. Though we esteemed Him not, He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. What love that God would send forth this tender Branch for us!

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But in this tender Branch is our hope of a glorious kingdom!

The tender Branch was laid in the grave, seemingly destroyed once and for all. But God did not leave Him there. He raised Him up from the dead, brought Him into heaven, and set Him at His right hand. The low-

ly Branch has been exalted, thus giving us a glorious hope.

In spite of the world’s opposition, our confident expectation is that the Branch will become the greatest of trees. Assyria boasted against Judah of old. But God asks Assyria, “Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?” (Is. 10:15). Assyria was but an instrument in God’s hands to chastise His people and ultimately to bring good to them. So, too, the governments of today might boast in their power as they come against the church. But our God is in the heavens working all things according to His sovereign plan to establish the kingdom of Christ in all its fullness.

According to God’s plan, the mighty kingdoms of the world will all come to nothing, just like the Assyrian empire. Assyria boasted, “Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?” (Is. 10:11). But God humbled mighty Assyria and cut her down as one clears a forest, felling the great trees and even cutting the thickets in order completely to lay the forest bare (Is. 10:33-34). So it will be with the world that boasts and rails against Christ and His people.

In the place of this once mighty forest, the Branch will grow up from its roots and bear fruit. He who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life was not destroyed. Instead, He sits as King over His everlasting kingdom, gathering, defending, and preserving His church. He sits enthroned in heaven above, ruling over a kingdom that supersedes all the kingdoms of the earth.

No matter then how bleak our circumstances might seem, no matter how great the enemies appear, no matter how weak we may feel, no matter that we do not see the answer immediately, our faithful covenant God will keep His promise. Using what appears to be weakest means, He will give salvation to His people.

Thus we have great hope. We hope expectantly for Jesus Christ to return as the glorious King over His Kingdom.

In this knowledge, our souls magnify the Lord and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior. Glory be to God for the Rod out of Jesse’s stump and the Branch from his roots!

**The wonder of the gospel is that Jesus of Nazareth was despised and rejected for our sakes. Though we esteemed Him not, He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. What love that God would send forth this tender Branch for us!**





## 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” (2)

## Distinguishing repentance and good works

Before I explain the concept of repentance, I want to demonstrate that repentance and good works of obedience should be distinguished as stated in one part of the decision of Synod 2021. I also want to show that this distinction is important in light of the connection that Scripture makes between repentance and remission.

In treating a protest against the decisions of Synod 2020, Synod 2021 demonstrated that the protest contained doctrinal misunderstandings, one of which was:

2) \_\_\_\_\_ fails to distinguish repentance and good works of obedience.

a) The Bible distinguishes between repentance and good works. Matthew 3:8, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” Acts 26:20, “...that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

b) Synod 2018 distinguished repentance from good works of obedience: “Though we may lose the experience of covenant fellowship by continuing in disobedience, we never gain it by our obedience, but it is restored by faith in Christ and in the way of repentance.”

c) \_\_\_\_\_ conflates repentance and good works of obedience. About Synod 2020’s teaching on *repentance*, \_\_\_\_\_ says “that our *good works* are activities that occur prior to the experience of particular blessings” (italics Synod’s).

d) This conflation appears already at the very beginning of his protest and contributes to his misunderstanding.<sup>1</sup>

Synod 2020 treated the protest of a sermon on *repentance*, and synod made decisions regarding *repentance*. A protest of that decision of Synod 2020 came to Synod 2021 and the protest contained pages of quotes from the confessions and Synod 2018 regarding *good works*. The protestant took quotations on *good works* and mis-

applied them to the synod’s statements on *repentance* to try to prove that Synod 2020 taught “the lie” and that the minister who preached the sermon on repentance was again, “giving to good works a place and function out of harmony with the Reformed confessions.” One part of the decision of Synod 2021 was to say, in essence, “You may not do that. In your theological argumentation you may not conflate repentance and good works so that there is no longer any distinction. When you do that you misread and misapply the decisions of previous synods and our confessions.”

Strictly speaking, repentance is not to be put in the category of “good works.” When we think theologically, and think with precision, we ought to think of repentance as one thing, and good works as something else. By *repentance* I am referring to the believer’s sorrowful turning from sin unto God. By *good works* (what synod called “good works of obedience”) I am referring to all the believer’s works of obedience performed according to the law of God in love for God and the neighbor (sometimes referred to as obedience, holiness of life, walking in God’s commandments). This is the Reformed understanding of good works in LD 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Q&A 91 defines good works as “only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory,” and then the Catechism proceeds to draw out for the catechumen what good works look like by expounding the *Ten Commandments* in LD’s 34-44. Good works are works of obedience to the law.

Merely *labeling* repentance a good work, or *referring* to repentance as a work when one is looking at repentance all by itself is one thing, a harmless thing. Some might conceive of good works as any good activity of the Spirit-filled believer, which would include repentance. It would be a simple task to find instances of ministers in our own churches referring to repentance as a good work, and I am not suggesting that such language be branded as “outside the bounds of orthodoxy.” For example, in the context of lamenting poor preaching that makes good works to consist of earthshaking events of

<sup>1</sup> PRC Acts of Synod and Yearbook 2021, p. 124.

social action for the improvement of society, Prof. Herman Hanko has taught that the child of God is rarely involved in such seemingly mighty events and that even in his seemingly insignificant walk of life he falls far short of God's demands: "Thus repentance becomes more and more important. In the final analysis, repentance is the one most important good work of the Christian. Of what value are earthshaking events without repentance?"<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Rev. Ronald Hanko has written about the repentance of the Ninevites: "We might notice too, that this repentance and humiliation are referred to in Jonah as works (v. 10), as indeed they are. Repentance for sin is one of the best works a Christian does, and so is humbling oneself before the Almighty."<sup>3</sup> These and similar examples of labeling repentance a "good work" are merely calling attention to at least two important truths. One, like the doing of good works of obedience to the law, repentance is an *activity* of the believer. Two, like good works of obedience, repentance is not an evil activity but a *good* activity originating in the sovereign and gracious work of the Holy Spirit within and proceeding from the good root of true faith.

In that same vein one can also find orthodox theologians calling faith a work, when looking at faith all by itself. Even Luther, that valiant defender of *sola fide* who vehemently denounced justification by faith and works, once wrote, "The text deals with the work that we are to perform, namely, to believe. Faith is a work that man must do, and yet it is also called the work of God; for this is the true existence, work, life and merit with which God desires to be honored and served."<sup>4</sup> Regardless of whether or not we agree with Luther's handling of the passage, he is merely pointing out that faith is indeed an *activity* to which God calls the believer. Elsewhere, however, Luther taught something very different: "You should say this, I mean, in order to keep the one true and correct faith—the faith without works. Although works follow faith, yet faith should not be works, and works should not be faith, lest they be confused; but the boundaries and the realms of the Law or works and of faith should be correctly dis-

tinguished from one another."<sup>5</sup> Everyone knows that in his voluminous writings and for the defense of the gospel Luther clearly distinguished faith and works; nonetheless, it is possible to find an occasional statement in which Luther himself blurs that distinction.

To repeat, when one looks at repentance all by itself, it is one thing to call or label repentance a good work merely in order to teach that repentance is an activity. However, and this is the point of synod, it is another thing to have the understanding that repentance is a good work and then through the lens of that understanding interpret Scripture, the confessions, synodical decisions and other readings, relate soteriological concepts, and formulate arguments. Then the blurring of the distinction becomes problematic, as we shall see. Thus, when we do our theology, it is good and necessary to strive for theological precision and to maintain distinctions established by the Word of God.

### Scripture's distinction

Scripture distinguishes repentance and good works. The first passage to which synod appealed is Matthew 3:8. Preaching to the Pharisees and Sadducees as a generation of vipers, John the Baptist declared, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." For all their differences, the Pharisees and Sadducees were characterized by hypocritical, self-serving, lifeless externalism that found security and peace in their vain confession, "Abraham is our father!" John was calling them to true repentance and to the corresponding attitudes and actions of a holy life that demonstrated genuine repentance. Luke's parallel account gives three examples of what these "fruits" look like. It is striking that John does not call attention to the first table of the law and the duties we and the self-righteous religious leaders of his day owe to God in worship, but to the second table of the law and how we treat people. Be not injurious in your dealings with others, but be charitable and just and honest! To the people who asked, "What shall we do then?" John replied, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:10-11). To the publicans, he said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (v. 13); and to the soldiers, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages" (v. 14). Being charitable toward others would be a proof that these vipers had turned from sin unto God in true repentance. That Matthew

2 *The Mysteries of the Kingdom* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 215. It is interesting that even here Hanko implies a distinction between good works and "the one most important good work," which is repentance.

3 *Standard Bearer* (Oct. 15, 2021), p. 35. Here also, repentance is not just another work among many, but there is the sense of some kind of distinction because repentance is "one of the best works."

4 "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John" in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 23 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 23. These sermons were delivered between the years 1530-1532.

5 "Lectures on Galatians" in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 26 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 273. These lectures were delivered in the year 1535.

3:8 distinguishes repentance and good works is clear to John Calvin. He comments:

It ought to be observed, that good works (Titus 3:8) are here called fruits of repentance; for repentance is an inward matter, which has its seat in the heart and soul, but afterwards yields its fruit in a change of life. But as the whole of this part of doctrine has been grievously corrupted by Popery, we must attend to this distinction, that repentance is an inward renewal of the man, which manifests itself in the outward life, as a tree produces its fruit.<sup>6</sup>

The second passage used by synod is Acts 26:20, "... that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Again, Calvin comments:

And because repentance is an inward thing, and placed in the affection of the heart, Paul requireth, in the second place, such works as may make the same known, according to that exhortation of John the Baptist: 'Bring forth fruits meet for repentance' (Matt. 3:8).<sup>7</sup>

Comparing Scripture with Scripture, one does not have to read a passage such as Jonah 3:10 and identify repentance as a "work." The passage states, "And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." The passage can easily be understood as referring to two things: repentance ("they turned from their evil way") and good works ("their works"), and the relation is that the works of the Ninevites demonstrated the genuine character of their repentance.

In harmony with the Scriptures, notable confessions of the church that treat repentance as a separate head of doctrine distinguish repentance and good works and treat the two in separate chapters. For example, The Westminster Confession of Faith contains Chapter 15, "Of Repentance unto Life," and Chapter 16, "Of Good Works."<sup>8</sup>

### The importance of maintaining the distinction

If in doing our theology, we do not maintain this biblical distinction between repentance and good works but conflate or confuse them in our thinking, then we run into problems interpreting Scripture. For example, how will we teach the relation between repentance and remission in Acts 3:19 (and by the way, that is exactly the question

we shall finally answer in these articles)? Peter issued the call of the gospel to the Jews who murdered the Prince of life: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out...." The call to repentance here is not a call to *works*, that is, a call to bring forth the *fruits* of repentance, a call to walk in the commandments, a call to love our neighbor in providing him a coat or conducting an equitable business transaction with him. Of course, a call to repentance is ultimately a call to good works of obedience because genuine repentance will always demonstrate itself in a holy life; but the call as such is not a call to works. Perform good works of charity that your sins may be blotted out? That is a Roman Catholic interpretation, but not a Reformed, which is to say, a biblically faithful, interpretation. Repent! "Repent" is not a call to bring to God your good works as an offering of praise and gratitude, but the call to turn away from your sins. Turn to God in sorrow, acknowledging you are unclean and disobedient!

Speaking of Rome, if there is a well-established historical example of a detrimental confusing of repentance and good works, it is found in what Chapter 14 of the Second Helvetic Confession calls "the pope's lucrative doctrine of penance." Relying upon Jerome's Latin Vulgate and its disastrous mistranslation of the Greek *metanoieite* ("repent") in Matthew 3:2 as *poenitentiam agite* ("do penance"), Rome turned repentance into works. Most egregiously, Rome turned repentance into a whole elaborate system of *meritorious* works. Rome taught that the poor sinner finds remission by confessing all his sins to a priest and then going home to perform the assigned acts of penance, which could include such things as saying a whole slew of "Hail Marys" and "Our Fathers," pouring money into the church coffers, living the single life, attending mass, various monastic exercises, and maybe even some self-flagellation. What about repentance—true, genuine repentance in a sorrowful turning from sin unto God?

Certainly, we also run into problems, serious and fatal doctrinal problems, if we operate with the understanding that *faith* is a work, and then that understanding runs through our theology. If faith is a work, then "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" does not have to mean "trust in Jesus and His work and thou shalt be saved," but it could mean something very different: "obey the Ten Commandments and thou shalt be saved." Or justification by faith becomes justification by working.

As we read theology and do our theology, think through concepts and relations, and formulate argumentation, let's follow the Scriptures as synod advised, and keep repentance and good works distinct.

6 *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), Vol. 1, 189-190.

7 *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 383.

8 See The Second Helvetic Confession for another example, chapters 14 and 16.





## All around us

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

# The Texas Heartbeat Act; The dangers of TikTok

## The Texas Heartbeat Act

On September 1, 2021 the Texas Heartbeat Act, which was approved by lawmakers in May, went into effect as the law of the state. Some describe this law as the toughest anti-abortion measure in the United States. The law prohibits abortionists from performing an abortion “if the physician detected a fetal heartbeat for the unborn child.” The law has a unique provision for its enforcement that is garnering much attention. It bans state officials from enforcing the law but allows for private citizens to bring charges in civil courts against anyone who performs an abortion banned by the law. Those who are sued and found guilty will be required to pay at least \$10,000 in damages and pay for other legal fees. The legal fight for and against the law has already reached the U.S. Supreme Court and is likely to continue for many years.

Sadly, the Texas law falls short of what is needed in the United States: the repeal of the *Roe v. Wade* decision (1973) that legally sanctions the murder of unborn humans. But it is heartening to know that the law is saving lives, and the issues of debate surrounding the law are worth our attention as Christians. Below is an article by Rebecca Parma that was published by thefederalist.com.<sup>1</sup>

### The Texas Heartbeat Act is Saving 100 Babies’ Lives Every Single Day

Right now, more than 100 babies are being saved from abortion every day in Texas. The Texas Heartbeat Act is currently enforceable, even as the abortion industry and Biden administration attempt to thwart it. There has been much legal back-and-forth and misrepresentation of this life-saving law, particularly on the unique way in which it is enforced. Let’s cut through that confusion.

The Texas Heartbeat Act prohibits elective abortion after the preborn child’s heartbeat is detected. Those who commit an abortion after this biological marker

in the child’s development, as well as those who knowingly aid and abet in that illegal abortion, can be sued. The lynchpin that has allowed the law to take effect is that the state is not allowed to enforce the law; rather, it is the responsibility of private individuals to hold the abortion industry accountable for following the law.

So far in Texas we are seeing the abortion industry comply with the new law. Eighty-five percent of abortions that previously would have been occurring in our state are now illegal. More than 100 babies per day are being given a chance at life. There have not been any credible assertions of violation. This means that the unique threat of private lawsuits under this law is successfully saving babies.

Civil penalties are the most effective in pro-life laws because the abortion industry is profit-driven. The industry profits off killing preborn children and does not want to lose money. So it complies with pro-life laws (even as it fights them in the courts). That is why the Texas Heartbeat Act uses civil remedies—because it incentivizes compliance from the abortion industry.

### Not Vigilantism

Despite the assertion by pro-abortion advocates and media, this is not vigilantism, and the civil remedies are not a bounty. The threat of a lawsuit and paying out at least \$10,000 for a violation is the consequence set up under this law for engaging in an illegal activity, namely, performing an abortion after the baby has a heartbeat.

Penalties function to deter illegal activity and to encourage compliance. Vigilantism implies lawlessness, and filing a lawsuit is not lawless. If a person believes an illegal abortion has been committed, she can bring a suit under the law, and a judge will evaluate the evidence and proceed from there.

The same holds for those who aid or abet in an illegal abortion. Rideshare platforms have ranted about this part of enforcement. However, Texas law already had a definition of aiding and abetting long before the Texas

<sup>1</sup> <https://thefederalist.com/2021/09/28/the-texas-heartbeat-act-is-saving-100-babies-lives-every-single-day>.



Heartbeat Act, and judges are used to applying this standard in other criminal activities.

For a driver with a ridesharing platform to be sued under the aiding and abetting provisions of the Texas Heartbeat Act, he would have to know where he's taking the pregnant woman, how far along in the pregnancy she is (is she past the point at which the baby's heartbeat is detectable?), and whether she's entering that abortion facility to obtain an abortion. This is the kind of high legal standard a judge would use in determining aiding and abetting of an illegal activity.

### No Frivolous Lawsuits

The same goes for the fear of "frivolous lawsuits." There is already a legal standard under which judges consider and dismiss frivolous lawsuits that existed long before this law. Even if you don't trust the pro-life activist who can bring the lawsuit, trust our legal system and the judges who are used to handling these situations every day, and are equipped through legal and evidentiary standards to do so.

The ability of any individual to bring a lawsuit under the Texas Heartbeat Act is a type of private enforcement that is already used in other areas of law (such as Medicaid fraud), including to a limited degree in other pro-life law. The Heartbeat Act merely extends this approach.

Besides, most pro-lifers who would bring a lawsuit under the Texas Heartbeat Act are not interested in monetary compensation—they are interested in preborn lives being spared from a violent and unjust death. That is why the law is clear that a pregnant woman cannot be sued under the law, because the purpose is to hold those who profit off the deaths of preborn children accountable: the abortion industry.

But why try this unique enforcement mechanism in the first place? Because the pro-life movement is tired of district attorneys refusing to enforce pro-life laws and activist federal judges holding pro-life policies up in

court for years on end, if not indefinitely. It is time to try a new approach. And that new approach is working.

Texas is the first state to actually see a heartbeat law take effect—the Texas Heartbeat Act is the strongest pro-life law since *Roe v. Wade*. The anti-life mob is trying to cancel the Texas Heartbeat Act, but they have not been successful. So instead they are misrepresenting the law and constantly nitpicking and finding new objections.

But the most important aspect of the law is this: Thousands of tiny Texans are being spared from the violence of death by abortion because of the way the Texas Heartbeat Act is enforced. No wonder those who promote abortion are so up in arms over its ingenuity.

### The dangers of TikTok

I know a little about Facebook. I do not have an account of my own anymore and only periodically use my wife's account. But I am told young people do not use Facebook very much. There are other social media platforms that are much more popular among young people, and the fastest growing platform is TikTok. I have never used TikTok, so I admit that I have no firsthand knowledge of it. But from what I have read, it is a very dangerous platform for anyone to use and especially for children and teens.

Ever heard of a TikTok challenge? I had not until I started seeing news reports about TikTok's list of "school" challenges. In September the "devious lick challenge" debuted on TikTok. Students were "challenged" to steal items from their schools. Schools have reported theft of many different items, which has often included the destruction of other property. In October the new challenge was called "slap a teacher" or "smack a staff member." If you do an Internet search, you will find there are alarming reports of students actually recording themselves slapping teachers and running away from them and then publishing these acts on TikTok. There are despicable challenges planned for the

**Ever heard of a TikTok challenge? I had not until I started seeing news reports about TikTok's list of "school" challenges. ...There are despicable challenges planned for the next nine months, which are not reprinted here because some of them are too vulgar to reprint and all of them promote evil. Are we overseeing the use of TikTok by our children and young people? Of course, we do not want them to participate in these challenges. But we also should forbid them from watching and being entertained by those who are posting videos about these challenges.**

next nine months, which are not reprinted here because some of them are too vulgar to reprint and all of them promote evil. Are we overseeing the use of TikTok by our children and young people? Of course, we do not want them to participate in these challenges. But we also should forbid them from watching and being entertained by those who are posting videos about these challenges.

Reports also show that TikTok exposes children and young people to videos of things such as pornography and drug use. It is bad enough that such evil is easily found by those who are seeking it on TikTok. But even if this content is not pursued, TikTok actively tries to “feed” it to accounts that belong to minors. This evil practice was exposed by an article appearing September 8, 2021 on *The Wall Street Journal’s* webpage.<sup>2</sup> The writers set up dozens of TikTok accounts registered for users aged 13-15 and reported on the videos that TikTok encouraged the users of these accounts to watch.

They write, “An analysis of the videos served to these accounts found that...TikTok can quickly drive minors...into endless spools of content about sex and drugs.” Every parent should take note of this brief summary of what these accounts of “minors” were exposed to:

TikTok served one account registered as a 13-year-old at least 569 videos about drug use, references to cocaine and meth addiction, and promotional videos for online sales of drug products and paraphernalia. Hundreds of similar videos appeared in the feeds of the *Journal’s* other minor accounts.

TikTok also showed the *Journal’s* teenage users more than 100 videos from accounts recommending paid pornography sites and sex shops. Thousands of others were from creators who labeled their content as for adults only.

Still others encouraged eating disorders and glorified alcohol, including depictions of drinking and driving and of drinking games.

The danger is not just exposure to the sinful content, but the app promotes obsession/addiction by often focusing the user’s attention on one thing. It is not hard to imagine a child who has never been exposed to pornography becoming addicted to it after spending a half-hour watching dozens of pornographic video clips—which can happen very easily on TikTok!

The article explains some of the efforts of TikTok to police the content fed to minors, but from what I read I am not convinced this is a high priority for the company. Additionally, given the amount of content that is constantly posted by users, effective policing by the company is well-nigh impossible. Parents cannot and must not believe someone else will protect their children for them while they are using TikTok or any other social media platform.

Maybe our children should not have social media accounts or even smart phones. I know that sounds radical today. But lately I have been struggling with whether it is foolish to let children and teens have access to apps with the evil that is accessible on apps like TikTok.

Think back to thirty years ago. There were no smart phones. The Internet was not yet public (it was made public April 30, 1993). What if in 1991 there was a book that everyone was reading; much of the content was good; some of it was neither good nor bad, but

made for entertaining reading; and then other portions of the book were filled with vile content—nude pictures, drug use, and more. I cannot imagine my parents allowing me to have that book back then (when I was 13), instructing me to read only the good parts and to stay away from the sinful parts. They would not have bought the book for me. They would not have allowed me to buy the book. They would have

forbidden me to have or to read such a book.

So how is it, I find myself asking, that today we allow our children to have phones with apps that admittedly have many good uses, but also have access to much more evil than any book published in 1991? I do not have a good answer to this question. But I do know that parents must be aware of the responsibilities they bear and the dangers their children face if they allow their children access to today’s technology.

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2 Rob Barry, Georgia Wells, John West, Joanna Stern, and Jason French, “How TikTok Serves Up Sex and Drug Videos to Minors,” *wsj.com*.



## Pillar and ground of truth

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

### The Council of Chalcedon (451): The background

The First Ecumenical Council, that of Nicea, met in 325. Fifty-six years later (381), the second one met in Constantinople. Fifty years later (431), the third Council met in Ephesus. But only *twenty* years elapsed between the third Council and the fourth, which convened in 451 in Chalcedon.

Perhaps twenty years between councils seems like a long time; after all, we are used to annual synods. But remember that provincial and regional councils met more often. Between ecumenical councils, which addressed matters of highest importance that pertained to Christendom, twenty years was relatively short. What went on in those twenty years?

#### The need for a creed

As we noted in our last article, the Third Ecumenical Council had done something well: it had defended the doctrine that Christ is one person with two natures, and had rejected the idea that Christ was two persons. However, the question about the relation of Christ's two natures to each other and their union in His one person was still not resolved. Because this question was not resolved, the Fourth Ecumenical Council could not be held soon enough! This is true for three reasons.

First, the Council of Ephesus was a messy affair, church politically. Good order was not followed. Because of this, many did not receive its answer as final.

Second, Ephesus had not provided a positive statement of the relation between Christ's one person and His two natures. Christians knew what *not* to believe and they knew what they *did* believe, but they did not always know how best to *explain* the truth *positively*. A fuller creed was needed to spell out this doctrine of Christ.

Third, two years after the two parties had disagreed at Ephesus, they met to formulate and sign a statement with which they could agree, called the Formula of Union. In the main, the Formula was orthodox, and the Chalcedonian Creed reflects much of its wording. But how could men who disagreed in 431 suddenly agree in 433 and jointly sign a doctrinal statement? People were

suspicious about this. After the signers of the document died, the distrust increased, and people were less willing to abide by the Formula of Union. A creed was needed to unite all.

#### Eutychianism

In this context, a man named Eutyches taught error. Eutyches was the head of a monastery in Constantinople. He followed the orthodox theology of Cyril. But he went off balance. Cyril had taught that Jesus Christ was one person with two natures—actually one person “out of two natures.” Cyril meant that the one person of the Son of God lives through a divine nature and a human nature. But Eutyches understood the phrase to refer not to Jesus Christ *possessing* two natures but to Jesus Christ *arising* out of two natures. Christ came “out of” the divine nature of God and the human nature of Mary. But having come, Eutyches said, Jesus did not possess two natures; He possessed only one, the divine. His human nature was taken up into the divine. So not man but God was born, suffered, crucified, was buried, and was raised.

This was not what the Council of Ephesus had meant, and this was not what the regional Synod of Constantinople in 448 declared. Both agreed that the incarnate Christ possesses two natures. Undeterred, Eutyches asked Pope Leo I to agree with him. His opponents also tried to convince the pope to side with them. And his opponents got their wish. But because of the unrest, some asked the emperor to call an ecumenical council.

The Emperor first called a regional synod at Ephesus in 449. Just like the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Synod of Ephesus in 449 was poorly conducted. The supporters of Eutyches prevailed, and they so badly treated the man who opposed Eutychianism that he died within a week. This synod also condemned the pope, who in turn used this controversy to strengthen his power as the Bishop of Rome.

A regional synod was not going to help matters. An ecumenical council was needed. Some pleaded with

Emperor Theodosius II to call an ecumenical council. The pope favored the idea, and suggested that the council be held in Rome, since all others had been held in the East.

### God's directing hand

Theodosius was not a strong emperor and probably would not have encouraged those who opposed Eutyches. But God wanted both a council to be held and one that would decide the matter rightly.

To that end, He had already raised up Pope Leo I. He was a strong pope, who would be remembered for

promoting the powers of the papacy. At the same time, he gave the church firm and solid direction in this theological matter.

God also raised up a new emperor. Theodosius died in 450, having fallen from his horse. Because he left no sons to succeed him, his brother-in-law Marcian became emperor. Marcian's wife, Pulcheria, had sided with the pope regarding these theological issues and Marcian sided with his wife! The new emperor called a council to meet in 451, not in Rome, but near Constantinople, so that the emperor could have more control than the pope.



## When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Sherry Koole, wife, mother, and grandmother in Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan

## The wonders of winter

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Psalm 19:1*

God reveals Himself to us not only in His written Word, but also in His creation round about us. God is a God of order, and in His wisdom brought order to His creation by creating the heavenly bodies on the fourth day, as recounted in Genesis 1:14: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years." He created these bodies—the sun, moon, and stars—to regulate time and seasons. It is under His control and the direction of His almighty hand that the rising of the sun (the greater light) brings about the dawning of each day, and the setting of the same reveals the moon (the lesser light) to rule our night.

Just as God in His wisdom regulates time by giving us the morning and evening of each day, He also regulates the seasons by divine wisdom. He caused the tilting of the earth's axis and, in so doing, determines the amount of light and heat different parts of the earth receive from the sun at various times throughout the year—bringing to us the different seasons, each at its God-appointed time. Scripture gives further testimony to this in Psalm 74:16 and 17 where we read, "The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter."

As He gives to each season its own beauty and purpose, the Lord makes very evident to us the truth that He alone is Creator, and He governs and controls all that He has created. And as colder weather now engulfs us (who live in the northern hemisphere), I want to take this time to focus on winter, seeing not only its power, beauty, and spiritual picture(s), but also through all of these the almighty power, majestic glory, and redeeming love of the God who calls it into existence.

*O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom has thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. Psalm 104:24*

Winter, though the coldest season of the year, can also be a very bright and beautiful time to behold. A sunny winter's day of freshly fallen snow blanketing the barren trees and covering the frozen ground clothes our world in a dazzling array of whiteness, brightness, and beauty. We read more of the Lord's handiwork regarding His designing of winter in Job 37:5-10:

God thundereth marvelously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend. For he saith to the snow, be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength. He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work. Then the beasts go into dens, and remain in their



places. Out of the south cometh the whirlwind; and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given; and the breadth of the waters is straitened.

Here we read that God speaks the snow into existence and breathes the frost and ice. What a wonder! A mere exhaling of God's breath and our world is paralyzed in the icy grips of winter. An accumulation of beautiful, soft lacy snowflakes can shut down our homes and cities for days on end, bringing to mind the words of the psalmist in Psalm 147:17, "Who can stand before his cold?" What power! What beauty! So much so, that we cannot help but stand in awe and know that this is solely the handiwork of God, the Creator.

As believers, we can do none other than stand in amazement and consider these wonders of God. Job 38:22 asks, "Hast thou entered into the treasure of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasure of the hail?" We, as God's people, cannot begin to comprehend the intricate design and beautiful makeup of the snow. But we do stand in awe and amazement as we explore the complexity of design and diversity of each individual snowflake, each being composed of tens or, perhaps, hundreds of tiny ice crystals. And God, the Creator, has so designed it that no two flakes are exactly alike. Now stop!—and imagine that for just a moment or two. We who have endured many snowstorms, experienced many snow-related power outages, and shoveled ourselves out of many heavy snowfalls, can *never*, no matter how closely or carefully we observe the snow, find any two flakes alike. This is truly a wonder—and only a God-created wonder at that.

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Psalm 51:7*

Winter also paints some beautiful pictures for the child of God. As parents and grandparents, we should take hold of whatever opportunities arise that enable us to share the beauty of these pictures and their meanings with our children and grandchildren. And since in my writing I often find it easier to express my thoughts by way of poetry rather than in paragraph form, I share the following with my readers in the hope that it might complement my article as well as give expression to my thoughts and feelings on the beauty and wonder of winter and the picture(s) it paints.

Soft, lacy, white snowflakes fell through the night,  
I woke in the morning to a world made bright,  
A dark, barren world made clean by the snow....  
What a beautiful picture I am so blessed to know.

For that dark, barren world is a picture of me,  
And I'm glad to be covered and made clean as can be.

Though my sins be the color of dark scarlet red,  
They're made whiter than snow by Christ's blood that was shed.

As I stand at the window, viewing winter outside,  
I'm ashamed of my sin, and ashamed of my pride.  
What filth and what stain is left by my sin,  
But the blood of the Lamb creates new life within.

We celebrate His birth in the cold of the year,  
Yet my heart is made warm—I have no cause to fear—  
For the Christ Babe of Bethlehem reigns in my heart  
The great gift of salvation to freely impart.

For though born in a stable, He's heir to the throne!  
Thus my glory's in Jesus, in Jesus alone!  
And in the snow-covered ground is picture I see  
Of how Christ shed His blood in atonement for me.

So oft when I think and sometimes ask why  
How Christ in my stead could so willingly die,  
My eyes fill with tears, to my knees I am driven  
To thank God up above for the Gift He has given.

Yes—God gave the Gift that He only could give—  
His Son as a ransom so that I might live.  
And so with uplifted voice I will raise  
Very joyful and thankful songs of praise.

As I gaze through the pane at the glistening white  
Experiencing the joy of my darkness made light,  
I see in the snow how from guilt I am free  
For Christ's cleansing blood makes me righteous as He.

What beauty we have in this picture God gives,  
And to know He's the reason each one of us lives  
With the hope of new life with Him up above,  
We stand in amazement at His saving love.

Oh, what a marvelous wonder He's wrought,  
Do we thank Him and praise Him as ever we ought?

It is my desire that the reader see in this poem a beautiful picture of the redeeming love of God for His people. The whiteness and brightness of the freshly fallen snow depicts the purity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose birth we commemorate and celebrate during this season of the year. It is through His lowly birth, suffering, death, and resurrection that we are given the unspeakable gift of salvation and life eternal. Thus, as we celebrate His birth in the cold of the year, we joy in the symbolism we find here. For as the snow covers and beautifies the barren and naked ground, so the shed blood of our Lord on Calvary covers the gloom of our sin and guilt, cleanses us, and presents us whiter than snow. Out of the cold and darkness of night our Dayspring from on High, our Bright and Morning Star, our Emmanuel has come. Our Lord Jesus, only Begotten of the Father, full

of grace and truth, has come. He, the Word, was made flesh and dwelt among us. He came to make known to us the Father. Came to make known to us our sin and misery. And came to make known to us the glad tidings of the gospel. Truly, we have reason to rejoice! For by His coming, He has dispelled the shadows of the night and turned our darkness into light.

*And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's. I Corinthians 3:23*

Truly, winter is a beautiful season—in both its reality and symbolism. We have only touched on its beauty and wonders. Much more could be said I am sure.

We, who are believers, know and see these wonders of winter and must teach them to our children and grandchildren. They, too, must learn and know that God speaks the snow and breathes the frost. They, too, must see and know the filthiness of sin, but also know

that their sins and ours have been washed away in the blood of our loving Savior, and that we now appear before Him whiter than snow. They and we, together, must render thanks to God for the unspeakable Gift of His only begotten Son. And as we celebrate His birth during the cold and darkness of winter, may our hearts glow warm with the joy of knowing that we are not our own but belong unto Him, body and soul, both in life and in death; and that He, with His redeeming love and precious blood, has fully satisfied for all our sins, delivered us from the power of the devil, cleansed us from all guilt, and made us whiter than snow and as righteous as He.

What a wonder! Truly a wonder! We are redeemed! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! We belong to Him! We are His, and He is God's. All praise and glory be given to Him! And may our lives be lives of gratitude for all that He has done.



## Church and state

Mr. Brian VanEngen, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney

# The Supreme Court rules unanimously in favor of religious liberty

United States Supreme Court rulings in recent years have revealed a Court deeply divided along ideological lines. For many years the nine justices of the court were often divided 5-4 on cases with ideological implications, with four justices consistently on the conservative side of social issues, and four justices on the liberal side, with Justice Anthony Kennedy providing the deciding vote that would swing the decision one way or another. A series of retirements and deaths of justices on the court during the presidency of President Donald Trump resulted in what many considered a 6-3 conservative majority, including the replacement of Justice Anthony Kennedy.

The Court recently ruled unanimously in a case involving a challenge by a Catholic agency against a pro-LGBTQ government policy. This case merits closer review for both what it does and does not represent about the status of Supreme Court jurisprudence.

The case, *Fulton v. Philadelphia*,<sup>1</sup> involved the question of whether a religious organization has to allow individuals whose lifestyles conflict with the organiza-

tion's religious beliefs to participate in services provided by the organization. The background to this case is as follows. Since 1798, religious organizations have provided care for needy children in Philadelphia. These religious organizations and other private agencies investigate couples who are willing to provide foster care, and certify them as being appropriate placements for needy children. The city of Philadelphia (City) then contracts with these organizations to provide foster care placements for needy children that the city takes into custody.

A local newspaper ran a story that Bethany Christian Services, based in Grand Rapids but operating offices in Philadelphia, would not certify same-sex couples to be foster parents. An investigation ensued and the City learned that Catholic Social Services (CSS) also refused to certify same-sex couples on religious grounds. The City ultimately stated that it would not renew contracts with foster care organizations that discriminated against same-sex couples. Bethany Christian Services changed its policy to comply, but CSS refused to change and its contract was not renewed.

This case was brought against the City by two foster mothers and by CSS, alleging that the City's actions

<sup>1</sup> *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 593 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2021).

had violated their First Amendment right to the Free Exercise of Religion. The foster mothers were from two different families that had previously provided foster care for children in need through CSS. CSS argued that certification as a foster family required them to put their stamp of approval on the relationship of the potential foster couple, and that to approve of a homosexual relationship would be an endorsement of that relationship, which would be contrary to their religious beliefs.

The Federal District Court refused to issue injunctive relief against the City, finding that CSS and the mothers were unlikely to prevail in their case. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals agreed, and ruled unanimously in favor of the City. CSS and the mothers then appealed to the Supreme Court.

The precedent that the lower courts relied upon in ruling in favor of the City was the Supreme Court decision in *Employment Division v. Smith*,<sup>2</sup> a 1990 case that had held that, if the government passes neutral laws of general applicability, they will be upheld even if they impose on the free exercise of religion. If a law is not neutral and generally applicable, it must pass what is known as “strict scrutiny,” and the government must show a compelling state interest that merits imposition on the exercise of religion. In the *Smith* case, an individual was denied unemployment benefits because of his use of a drug called peyote in a religious ceremony. Although the law impinged on the free exercise of his religion, it treated his religion the same as others, and applied equally to the general public. Applying this precedent to the facts of the *Fulton* case, the courts found that the City’s prohibition on discrimination applied equally to all religions, and also applied equally to the general public.

The Supreme Court unanimously disagreed with the lower courts. First, the court found that Philadelphia’s law was not neutral and generally applicable because the law that prohibited participating agencies from discriminating based on sexual orientation included a provision that exceptions to this rule could be provided “at the sole discretion” of the Commissioner of Human Services. The Court found that this exception allowed the government to select who received an exception, so the law was no longer neutral and generally applicable to all potential participants.

The City had also argued that discrimination based on sexual orientation violated the Philadelphia Fair Practices Ordinance, which prohibits interference with public accommodations based on sexual orientation. The Court stated that certification as a foster parent was not a service generally made available to the public

within the usual sense of a public accommodation, and therefore this act did not apply to the case.

Because the City’s contractual prohibition on discrimination was not neutral and generally applicable, the Court found that strict scrutiny applied, and that the City had not shown a compelling interest in preventing CSS from providing services. Chief Justice Roberts, writing the majority opinion, wrote that the City had burdened CSS’s religious exercise by putting it to the choice of curtailing its mission or approving relationships inconsistent with its beliefs. In essence, the Court’s decision rested on the fact that the government’s ability to grant exceptions kept the government’s actions from being neutral and generally applicable.

Therefore, although at first blush this decision seems to be a rare unanimous decision in favor of religious liberty, the grounds for the ruling are so narrow that the decision is of little assistance to believers. Chief Justice Roberts seems inclined to try to keep the Court from being politicized, especially with public discussion of “packing the Court” with additional liberal justices. By construing the decision in this case so narrowly, the Chief Justice was able to build a coalition that demonstrated unanimity on the sensitive issue of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

However, although the Court was unanimous in its result, three Justices—Alito, Gorsuch, and Thomas—filed concurring opinions that agreed with the result of the opinion, but argued that *Smith* should be overturned to protect religious freedom. Justice Alito pointed out that if Prohibition-era legislation banning alcohol had not contained exceptions for religion, it could have outlawed communion in churches, and the legislation would have been upheld under *Smith*. These justices argued that *Smith* had changed forty years of prior precedents, and that the law should go back to the standard before *Smith*, that a law that imposes a substantial burden on religion can only be sustained if it is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling government interest.

In contrast, Justice Barrett wrote a concurring opinion that was joined by Justice Kavanaugh, which acknowledged that there were textual and structural arguments against *Smith*, but that “there would be a number of issues to work through if *Smith* were overruled.” Ultimately these justices avoided overruling *Smith* by sidestepping instead to the narrow issue of the City’s ability to grant exceptions “in its sole discretion.” This position seems shortsighted, since, as Justice Alito pointed out, the City could simply re-write its contract to remove this discretionary exemption language, and again enforce the prohibition on discrimination. The

2 *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

facts of the case also included indications that the City had taken actions with the intent to try to force CSS to provide services to homosexuals, and CSS had argued that the City had transgressed the neutrality standard by proceeding in a manner intolerant of religious beliefs. The Court in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case,<sup>3</sup> involving the Colorado wedding-cake baker, had ruled in the baker's favor in part because of the hostile actions of the Colorado Civil Rights Commission towards his religion. But the Court in this case sidestepped all such issues by taking the narrow ruling that it did. It appears that rather than a 6-3 conservative majority, the Court may be made up of three liberal justices, Breyer, Kagan, and Sotomayor, three conservative justices, Alito, Thomas, and Gorsuch, and three more moderate justices who are more prone to form coalitions, Roberts, Kavanaugh, and Barrett.

There are still lessons we can learn from this decision.

<sup>3</sup> *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 584 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2018)

First, it was again demonstrated that public accommodations are more easily regulated by the government. When we open our schools up to the general public for sporting events and other activities, are we providing public accommodations that invite government regulation and intrusion? We must be very wise in dealing with such issues. Next, we must not hesitate to state our religious beliefs and acknowledge them as the basis for our actions. This is also a necessary part of our Christian walk, but in the legal context it also provides opportunity to avail ourselves of the legal protections that have been provided. In the *Fulton* case, the City argued that certification of a foster couple was not a religious activity, but CSS stood firmly on the principal that their approval of a same-sex couple was an endorsement of that relationship. Too many in the church world today waffle on such issues in an attempt to accommodate many viewpoints, and we must be cautious that we are not tempted to do likewise. May our heavenly Father strengthen us to have wisdom and stand in these trying times.



## Pertaining to the churches in common— Domestic Mission Committee

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and secretary of the DMC

# Report of the Domestic Mission Committee

What are we doing in home missions? Events this year have left our churches without a home missionary and a calling church. Our only home missionary, Rev. A. Spriensma, took a call to our Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN in January of this year. Due to the loss of her minister and half of her congregation, the Byron Center PRC decided that she could no longer serve effectively as the calling church for another home missionary. So, what is happening in the work of home missions? What is the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) doing?

The DMC is busy not only in seeking another home missionary but also in laying the groundwork for what we pray will result under God's blessing in more effective mission work.

Let's begin with seeking another home missionary.

The DMC informed the 2021 Synod of its intentions to find another congregation in the West Michigan area to recommend to the 2022 Synod to be the call-

ing church. In conjunction with this potential calling church, the DMC would make plans for future mission labors to be presented to Synod 2022.

Rather than wait until the 2022 Synod to move forward with the calling of another home missionary, the 2021 Synod authorized the DMC to designate a calling church from the West Michigan area who would call a missionary as soon as possible and work with the DMC in developing a new field of labor according to the mandate of Synod 2016 (*PRC Acts*, Art. 17). The mandate of the 2016 Synod was for a missionary to develop his own field of labor, thereby implementing the policy for mission work set forth years ago by the 1965 Synod. Synod's motivation was that missions is one of the primary callings of the church. The calling of another home missionary, therefore, is urgent enough that Synod should not wait until 2022.

And so the DMC is in the process of finding another



calling church in the West Michigan areas. The DMC has three criteria for choosing a calling church. First, how active her Evangelism Committee is and whether this reflects the spirit of the congregation. Second, her resources in terms of “manpower” to work effectively as a calling church. Finally, her ability and willingness to contribute financially to the work. The DMC has approached three different congregations with the request to be considered as the calling church for home missions.

Pray that the Lord provides not only a calling church for home missions but also a man to serve as home missionary.

Next, the DMC is working on better use of technology and the denominational website for future mission work.

The 2021 Synod directed the DMC to expand greatly its use of technology, Internet, and radio to establish a concrete field of labor for a missionary. Technology unknown to us a few decades ago has been developed and is part of the daily life of our society. Our churches should make use of this technology to reach prospective contacts in our efforts to develop a new field of labor. But synod would also have the DMC make more use of the older technology of radio that continues to be used widely and for which we have ready-made materials in the Reformed Witness Hour radio program.

To implement this mandate, the 2021 Synod also instructed the DMC to form a new sub-committee of qualified individuals to oversee and maintain the denominational website ([prca.org](http://prca.org)) and all other denominationally related technology (social media, podcasts, etc.)

The DMC has appointed an eight-member subcommittee to carry out this mandate. This committee includes members of the DMC as well as various members of the denomination who have expertise in website and Internet technology. This committee is discussing better ways to outline and organize the content of an updated website. It is considering three categories on the home page that will target those new to Christianity, those new to the Reformed faith and those who are members of the PRCA. It is also working on hiring a new webmaster to replace Chuck Terpstra, who has faithfully served in this capacity for a number of years and desires to be relieved.

Finally, the DMC is working on the formulation of a mission manual.

The DMC has been working off and on for the past decade on a Domestic Missions Policy Manual for use in our churches. As reported to Synod 2021, the DMC has been collecting and researching various documents

produced by our churches on the topic of domestic missions, as well as resources produced by other conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. The committee has outlined several subjects to be included in this manual:

- The theological foundations of domestic missions
- Carrying out the Great Commission in the twenty-first century
- Guidelines for branch mission work
- Guidelines for Macedonian-call mission work
- Guidelines for network mission work
- Guidelines for the calling church
- Guidelines for the domestic missionary
- Guidelines for the DMC’s work
- Guidelines for use of digital media in domestic missions
- Guidelines for the use of non-ordained missionary assistants

The DMC is currently enlisting writers experienced in missions to participate in writing this manual.

The DMC anticipates this mission manual to be of great value in the work of missions. First, it will help our churches crystalize their thinking on the principles and practices of home missions. Much has been written in the past by former missionaries in our churches. Much also has been written by conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches concerning missions. The DMC seeks to pull from this wealth of material the biblical principles and practices of home missions for inclusion in this mission manual. This then can be the basis for further study and development of home mission work in the future. In addition, the vision of the DMC is that such a manual would be used to familiarize our churches on the principles and workings of home missions. Home missions will flourish under God’s blessings only when the work of missions lives in the hearts of God’s people. Our prayer is that this manual will be an important part of promoting a heart for missions.

And so, what is the DMC doing? It is busy finding a calling church. It looks to call a home missionary soon. And it is laying groundwork for what hopefully, under God’s blessing, will be more effective home mission work in the years to come.

The DMC covets your prayers. And as you pray for the work of home missions, also pray that the Lord raises up men in our churches who aspire to the work of missions. “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).



## Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Holstege, PRC missionary stationed in Manila, Philippines and pastor-elect of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada

# The covenant of God and our mission to the world (5) Covenant, missions, and antithesis

Previous article in this series: August 2021, p. 449.

There are people in the world today, believers and their seed, with whom God has established His covenant.

God has given them, especially the ministers of the gospel among them, a mission to the world: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.”

But God has also given them a command to live in antithesis to that world: “Come out from among them and be ye separate.”

In the Old Testament, God established His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their spiritual seed after them in the nation of Israel. As He called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees, entered into a covenant relation with him, and exhorted him to walk before Him as a pilgrim and stranger in the earth, likewise He later delivered the seed of Abraham from the land of Egypt and called them to walk with Him and be separate from the heathen nations, for Israel would dwell in safety alone (Deut. 7:6; 33:28). Certainly, God ordained and called them to be His witnesses to the world, to declare His glory among the heathen (Is. 43:10; Ps. 96:3). Certainly, they clung to the promise that someday God would bless all the families of the earth as the spiritual seed of Abraham, and all the ends of the world would remember and turn unto the Lord (Gen. 12:3; 17:4; Ps. 22:27). Certainly, they were destined to bring forth the Messiah whom God would give for a covenant of the people and a light to the Gentiles to open the blind eyes of the heathen in the day of the Lord (Is. 42:6-7). But God did not yet send them into the world to proclaim those promises or that salvation. Rather, He set them apart from the other nations and commanded them to dwell with Him in spiritual and physical isolation from them. However, that changed when Christ came.

In the New Testament, God continues to establish His covenant with His elect, but not just in Israel. God gave Christ not only for the elect Jews but also for “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as Simeon sang over the baby Jesus (Luke 2:32). Through Christ, who died on the cross for the elect of every people, tribe, nation, and language, God has broken down the wall between Jew and Gentile so that all nations now flow into Mt. Zion (Is. 2:2; Eph. 2:11ff.). No longer does He call His covenant

people to be physically separate from the other nations of the world. No longer is there any external antithesis between Israel and those nations. Rather, God sends His covenant people on a mission, led by the preachers of the gospel, to go into those nations, to cross cultural boundaries, to reach out to the lost. God is pleased to use His covenant people to call His covenant people out of the darkness into His marvelous light. God will not allow us to remain physically separate, hiding our light under a bushel within the covenant community. But through Christ He makes us the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hid, in the world but not of the world (Matt. 5:14-15; John 17:16).

On his missionary journeys, Paul preached first to the Jews, the covenant people of God in the external sense. But when they rejected the gospel, he declared, “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:46-48). Knowing that Christ has torn down the wall between Jews and Gentiles and sent His servants to open the eyes of the blind and “to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18), Paul went outside the covenant community and shined the light of the gospel to the heathen.

I believe we would do well to develop our thinking about the covenant, missions, and the antithesis. I would like to do so in two respects: first, in respect to ministers of the gospel; and, second, in respect to all believers. In the remainder of this article, I will begin to examine the covenant, missions, and the antithesis with regard to ministers of the gospel. In a future article, Lord willing, we will turn our attention to all believers in general.

Where there is a culture for the extension of God’s covenant with both the children of believers *and* all who are afar off whom the Lord our God shall call, there will not be found a separatist mentality with regard to minis-

ters of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> We sometimes have a separatist mentality when it comes to the extension of God's covenant. That is, although we know that the antithesis is entirely spiritual in nature in the New Testament, and that we are to be constantly shining the light of the gospel into the world, we sometimes think and live as if the antithesis is physical, and we mainly need to shine that light inwardly to us and our children. We focus inward, devoting the lion's share of our thoughts, prayers, energies, resources, and conversations to our own needs in the covenant community. We think of the many vacant churches in the denomination that need pastors to feed the sheep and lambs. We think of our many Christian schools that seem always to need more teachers. We are reminded of these needs regularly in our church magazines and bulletins. We are exhorted to pray fervently to the Lord of the harvest to send forth more laborers into the churches. We make those prayers often in church and at home. We cry out to God to raise up young men and women to devote their lives to the churches or schools. These needs are real. They are urgent. They are important. But in all of this intense focus on our own needs, we may be tempted to forget about missions. When such a focus continues for many decades, we perpetuate and develop a church culture that is not for missions but that is to some degree separatist. I would call it an "Old Testament church culture." We raise the little boys and girls of the covenant in such a way that they believe the greatest need is always for more pastors for our churches and teachers for our schools, but not so much more missionaries to send into the world.

When such a mentality exists pervasively for many years in a particular covenant community or denomination, can they expect God to raise up young men who have a fiery zeal for His worldwide mission? Can we expect Him to raise up young men who receive the conviction that Christ might be sending them to leave behind their family and friends, to cross cultural boundaries, to live in poor countries, to learn new languages, to go and proclaim the gospel of grace to a people afar off? We can expect that God will provide pastors for our churches and teachers for our schools to meet our needs, to be sure, for He is a faithful Father who will much less deny us what we ask of Him in true faith than our parents will refuse us earthly things. But can we expect Him to

provide missionaries, men who make known already in seminary that they are interested in missions, who have a burden for the elect who are still lost, who feel a growing compulsion to preach the glad tidings to those who have not yet heard, if it is God's will for their life?

However, when the covenant people of God remain conscious of the truth that they are a city on a hill that cannot be hid, that they must constantly seek to shine the light of the gospel to the world, then things look different. We focus our attention not only on our own needs but also on the needs of the world of God's elect out there. Even when we have many vacancies in the churches and schools, we continue to devote much thought, prayer, energy, resources, and conversation to the effort of calling and sending ministers of the gospel to mission fields near and far. We thank God when He gives us a mission field in a faraway nation like the Philippines and gives us missionaries to go there, but we do not let ourselves think that we have done enough if we send a few missionaries to one foreign nation. Rather, we endeavor to investigate all the contacts that God gives us throughout the world, for example in Mexico, Africa, India, and Myanmar, and we pray that God will give us two or more missionaries to send to each of those nations too, if He so wills.

When a covenant community grows in its sense of the urgency of the worldwide mission of God, we can expect Him to raise up more and more men who are zealous to bring the gospel into the world. In our experience as churches, it seems to take a long time for a minister to accept the call to missionary service abroad. God is evidently not pleased to prepare and appoint those men who decline the call to a mission field. I heard it said once that a minister may be a Paul or a Timothy. Like Paul, the one kind preaches the gospel "not where Christ was named" (Acts 15:20), to the heathen. But like Timothy, the other kind is to "abide still at Ephesus" (I Tim. 1:3) to preach the gospel in a local church and its environs. When a minister receives the call to be a missionary, he must very seriously consider whether Christ calls him to be a Paul or a Timothy. When a covenant community is heavily focused on her own needs, we cannot expect many ministers to have the burden of a Paul and to accept the call to bring the gospel into the heathen world. But when we as a people grow in our sense of the urgency of global missions, God will prepare men from their mother's womb throughout their childhood and youth so that they accept that call when it comes.

O what joy if the Lord God would open the doors of more nations outside our own and give us ministers who would count it a privilege to preach the gospel in those foreign fields!

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1 "A kind of halfhearted interest in the work of missions. This kind of interest is a result of the attitude that mission work is a luxury that the church of Christ may engage in only when it has enough money and preachers. Mission work is a secondary work of the church.... Closely related to this extreme is the attitude of separatism among some..." (Wilbur Bruinsma, *Standard Bearer*, "Defining Missions," Nov. 15, 2007).

O what joy if Christ would prepare more men with the gifts and zeal needed to enter foreign nations and teach the Reformed faith where only the Romish or Arminian Christ has been named.

O what joy if He would *even* give us men with the gifts and zeal needed to cross cultural, economic, linguistic, and religious boundaries to preach the pure gospel of salvation where Christ has *not* been named, on the frontier of missions, in the darkness of the heathen world.

If I walk by sight, perhaps saying that I'm a "realist," I might say our denomination is too small to do much mission work in the world. I might say we have too few churches, too few members, too few ministers, and at the moment, too few seminary students. I might also tend to think that we have too many vacancies.

But remembering what God told Gideon, "The people that are with thee are *too many* for me to give the Midianites into their hands," I believe God can do great things with small numbers. I believe God will do greater things in missions through our denomination by im-

pressing on our hearts the truth that He is on a mission to establish His covenant not only with us and our children but also with all the elect who are afar off, and He calls us to be His instruments in accomplishing it.

To conclude these opening thoughts about the covenant, missions, and the antithesis with respect to ministers of the gospel, let us seek to remove from our thinking any separatist mentality that focuses too heavily on our own needs and longs to hoard our resources and manpower and to hunker down inside our covenant community, as it were, until Christ returns. Let us rather understand that we are not Old Testament Israel but the New Testament church, called to be spiritually, not physically, separate from the world, a city on a hill that must send bearers of the light of the gospel into the world until the beast rises out of the sea and puts an end to it.

In my next article, I hope to examine the covenant, missions, and the antithesis in respect to the life and ministry of a missionary in a foreign culture.



## Bring the books...

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

*Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* by Rev. Ron Hanko (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2020). \$19.95 hard cover. 160 pp. Reviewed by Rev. Joe Holstege.

The children of God suffer. Some of them suffer more than others, but all of them suffer. They suffer as they pass through life in a fallen world. They suffer from trouble in their families and distress in their marriages. They suffer upheaval in the world and disruption in the church. They suffer persecution and injustice at the hands of men. They suffer beside quiet sickbeds or still coffins.

The glory of God's Word is that it does not remain silent on the sidelines as the children of God suffer. The Word of God speaks to that suffering in ways no other word either can or may. Perhaps there is no greater example of this speech of God to the suffering saints than what we find in the book of Job. Scripture itself commends this book and its namesake character to the child of God who finds himself grappling with suffering in his own life. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job..." (James 5:11).

Yet the book of Job is challenging. A young child can grasp the basic storyline of Job's prosperity, his suffering, and his ultimate correction and restoration

in a thirty-minute catechism lesson. However, a beginner's catechism lesson rarely delves too deeply into the three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends that make up the main part of the book. Even a seasoned Christian can quickly find himself lost in the many poetic turns of phrase and deep questions raised by the six speakers from Job 4-41.

The great value of Rev. Ron Hanko's new commentary on Job is that it makes this large and challenging book of the Bible accessible. *Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* is purposely inexhaustive when it comes to a word-for-word breakdown. "That would require too much space, would almost certainly be repetitious, and would obscure the main purpose of the book" (p. xi). A glance at the table of contents will help you keep your bearings by making the basic form and structure of the book visible. The commentary itself then works through each of these main sections, keeping the focus on the main points and how they develop and build on one another. The assumption of the author is clearly that you





will have your Bible open on your lap as you use this book as a guide into its main themes and applications.

What the book lacks in detail, however, it makes up in focus on the big picture. The great concern of Rev. Hanko is clearly that God would speak through His book of Job, and that God's people would hear God's Word about their suffering. Some of the things spoken by Job or his three friends may, in fact, be wrong in their content, emphasis, or application. But that does not take away from the inspiration of the book of Job as a whole. "More, it is God's final word on the matter" (p. ix). Following the lead of the biblical text, the commentary therefore carries us along through the cycles of speeches to the great conclusion of the matter when the Lord Himself descends in the whirlwind. I have never before experienced the hair of my arms standing on end when reading a commentary on the Bible, but I have also never realized what a striking scene it must have been as Elihu was speaking his last words, even as clouds were gathering on the dark horizon and the winds picking up. "From the storm God speaks, and if the storm were not enough to silence every mouth, God holds before his servant Job his unspeakable and incomprehensible glory as creator and upholder of all things" (p. 125). Where Job has been looking for a meeting with God in order to demand an explanation for his suffering, "getting what he wished, Job finds he has nothing to say" (p. 125).

That focus on the big themes of the book enables the author to make many warm and instructive applications along the way. From instruction on how *not* to comfort a brother in the church (hint: *not* like Job's three miserable friends), to highlighting the *limits* with which a believer

may question God as he suffers, the commentary brings the main message of the book of Job to bear on the lives of God's people. The great lesson that Job, his friends, and we need to learn is "that God is the great redeemer of his people, not in spite of their trials and afflictions, but in their trials and afflictions" (p. 128). Thus, the title of the book, which calls attention to the distinctive light the sovereignty of God brings upon the reality of Christian suffering.

*Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* could be used profitably by any Christian who desires to work through the book of Job in his or her own personal devotions. As you keep the biblical text open on your lap, the commentary will keep you from losing sight of the big picture and the main applications. I also kept thinking to myself as I read the book, that it would serve as a helpful tool for a Bible study group. Maybe Bible study groups tend to stay away from Job, given its length and complexity. The commentary may help a study group work through the biblical text in a reasonable amount of time (keeping to the main sections, rather than individual chapters) while enabling fruitful discussion on the main questions raised and answered in the book of Job.

The children of God suffer. Of that, there can be no doubt. The question is not whether we will suffer. The question is, where will we turn for comfort and instruction in the midst of our sufferings? The answer to that question for the Christian can only be, to the Word of God; and in particular, to the Word of God in the book of Job. May the Lord use this new commentary to aid the children of God as they seek such comfort and instruction in the midst of all their sufferings.

## Reports

# Secretary's report—annual RFPA meeting\*

Every Friday our business manager Alex Kalsbeek sends out his update on the work accomplished for that week. At the top of that update he always includes the mission of the RFPA. That mission reads as follows: *Our mission is to glorify God by making accessible to the broadest possible audience material that testifies to the truth of Scripture as understood and developed in the Reformed tradition.* That mission is always in the forefront of the minds of the staff, and the board has kept that mission in front of

us as well as we have worked for you this past year.

Speaking of the staff, this year saw a transition in the staff at the RFPA. After faithfully serving the RFPA for 18 years, Paula Roberts left to be a mother to triplets (Owen, Samuel, and Homer). We thank her for her years of service and wish her God's blessing as she continues to serve God as a wife and mother. The RFPA hired Marco Barone in January and he was able to work with Paula for several months to learn the position. We look forward to continuing to work with him.

We will also be seeing transitions in the *Standard Bearer* this year. As was announced in the July issue of

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\* Held September 23, 2021 at Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI.

the *Standard Bearer*, Professor R. Dykstra has stepped down as editor. Rev. Koole also finished his role as editor in September. We would like to thank them for their faithful labors these past 17 years. We pray that the Lord will be with them in their continued work in our churches. As was recently reported, Prof. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Joshua Engelsma will be joining Prof. Gritters as editors of the *Standard Bearer*. Please ask the Lord to give them wisdom and the pen of a ready writer.

The *Standard Bearer* continues to be an important part of fulfilling our mission to testify to the truths of Scripture as developed in the Reformed tradition. Our subscriber base has dropped a bit, but we have almost 2,300 subscribers across sixteen countries and thirty-four states. We are also thankful to the thirty-eight staff writers for the *Standard Bearer*. Without your writings the *Standard Bearer* would not be what it is. We would encourage you to continue to defend the Reformed faith and to glorify God in your writings.

Another magazine joined the ranks of the RFPA this year. We are very pleased to present *Ignited by the Word*, a magazine targeting children in preschool through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It contains everything from devotionals, church history articles, and apologetics, to reader submissions, arts, and crafts. We believe it will be a valuable addition to every household with children and would encourage you to check out their website at [ignitedbytheword.org](http://ignitedbytheword.org).

We were blessed with four book-club books this year. The first was *Watchman on the Walls of Zion: The Life and Influence of Simon van Velzen* by Joshua Engelsma. This is a biography of a man who was a Reformer of the church of Christ in the Netherlands in the Secession of 1834. This book corrects the ignorance and misconceptions of many by setting forth the fascinating life of an influential figure in the history of Christ's church.

The second book was *Christ and His Church Through the Ages Volume 1: The Ancient Church (AD 30-590)* by Herman Hanko. The book relates how Christ faithfully guided the church from the ministry of the apostles through the fall of the Roman Empire. Highlights of this history include the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles, the persecution of the church under Roman emperors, the deliberations of the ecumenical councils, and the battle for the truth of sovereign grace.

The next book was *Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* by Ronald Hanko. The book of Job is God's commentary on the suffering and trials of His people. The book describes suffering on a scale seldom seen, but shows our weaknesses and the temptations we face when under the hand of God. For that reason it is in-

structive and corrective but is also of great comfort, for it points those who are suffering to God's sovereignty in trials and to His faithfulness and saving grace to His own. Rev. Hanko's book is not meant to be an exhaustive, verse-by-verse explanation of the book of Job but is an attempt to show how the book fits together and leads up to its grand climax in the appearance of God. It also attempts to show that Job has often been misunderstood and maligned, and though guilty of sin, as we all are in suffering, is nevertheless one whose faith and hope in God are sure.

The final book club book is *The Church's Hope: The Reformed Doctrine of the End: Volume 1: The Millennium* by David J. Engelsma. This book is the first volume of a set of two volumes that can be considered the *summa* of the author's longstanding preaching and teaching on issues pertaining to eschatology and the end times. The book reminds all Christians that the errors concerning the millennium affect the hope of the church. The controversy over the millennium is fundamental.

This year we also published *I Remember Herman Hoeksema: Personal Remembrances of a Great Man* by David J. Engelsma. Published originally as a series of articles in *Beacon Lights* magazine, *I Remember Herman Hoeksema* consists of the recollections of David J. Engelsma, a student of Herman Hoeksema. Written for young people, these articles show something of the man whom many know only as an author and theologian.

We also were able to reprint *The Church Order Commentary* by Idzerd van Dellen and Martin Monsma. This revised third edition is the accepted standard for the interpretation and application of the Church Order of Dordrecht by Reformed denominations. This weighty and time-tested commentary instructs us today on the need for a book of order for biblical consistency in church government.

This year the board also adopted a new three-year plan. The board periodically updates this plan to help us focus on our mission. The first item on this plan is to develop our new tiered membership model. The goal of this model is to develop a closer relationship with our supporters and increase the value that they receive from the RFPA. It will also better help finance our activities to support the mission. More details were given at the association meeting and may be sent to those who ask.

We have been working to expand our translations available. We are working on Spanish translations of *Doctrine According to Godliness* and *Preparing for Dating and Marriage*. *Doctrine According to Godliness* was translated into Hungarian, as well as *His Mercy Endureth Forever*. We also were able to publish

3,000 copies of *Reformed Dogmatics* in Portuguese. We were also able to send fourteen boxes of books to the Philippines.

We have been working on promoting the RFPA books. We promoted *Doctrine According to Godliness* on challies.com, a Reformed blog that focuses on book reviews. We have also been experimenting with advertising with Google ad words. We expect to expand this in the upcoming year. The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology had a conference on the Trinity. We were able to promote Prof. Engelsma's *Trinity and Covenant* and gave away thirty copies.

Finally, we wanted to update you on the improperly edited books. We are nearing completion on *Wonder of Grace* and hope to have that available by the end of the year. There is a significant amount of work involved in getting the works into a form that can be sent to the printer. Be assured that the board is placing a high priority on this work.

The RFPA board would like to thank the outgoing board members—Nate DeVries, Jon Drnek, and Ron

Koole. Their faithful work was of great value and benefit to the board and the association.

We would encourage you to read. Read good, solid, Reformed material such as we provide. The Lord uses such material for the strengthening and comforting of His flock. The reading may challenge you, but the Lord will use it for your personal growth and the good of His church.

Above all, we would ask that you pray for the RFPA. Pray that the Lord will give diligence and wisdom to the board so that we can carry out the responsibilities that you have given us. We can do nothing without Him, and selling books is useless if He does not choose to use them for the good of His church and the glory of His name. Pray that God will be with the writers so that they will write books that defend the faith and expose the lie. Ask Jehovah that He will give us more writers and more books. Ask that He will send us readers so that the truth will go forth into every nation, tongue, and tribe.

In Christ's name and for the RFPA Board,  
Jon Drnek, Secretary



## 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

### PRC news (Denominational)

- **Minister calls:**

On November 7 Rev. D. Holstege accepted the call to serve as the new minister of Wingham PRC (Ontario). We rejoice with this newly reorganized congregation in God's great goodness in providing a pastor so soon for them. And may He pave the way for a smooth transition as Rev. Holstege and family finalize the work in the Philippines as missionary.

On November 14 Rev. Spronk declined the call to Covenant of Grace PRC.

- **Seminary**

On October 28 and 29 the faculty held a special conference on preaching at Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Four speeches were given by four of the professors on various subjects—from the power and content of the preaching (the gospel of Christ!) to the commands of the gospel and how God's Word is to be applied. If you would like listen to or watch the speeches online, visit Trinity PRC's Sermonaudio channel or the seminary's website ([prcts.org](http://prcts.org)).

### PRC news (Congregational)

It's the time of year for annual congregational meetings, as the church bulletins indicate. New officebearers are chosen, church budgets are adopted, and special proposals are considered and voted on. May we not take for granted the freedoms we still enjoy to be able to conduct this business of the Lord and carry on His work in and through us as members of His church.

On November 10, under the oversight and work of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, First PRC of Edmonton (Alberta) was reorganized as a congregation and the consistory reconstituted. Rev. T. Miersma (emeritus) was a big help in ministering to the saints there after the recent schism in that church. Classis West is now providing pulpit supply. May the Lord bless and keep them as they start anew.

We now have a little more information on Doon PRC's (NW Iowa) building project. This was sent in by our previous church news editor: "The addition to Doon's church building is well underway. What began as a need

for a larger narthex is now intended to include a council room and main floor restrooms along with classrooms in the basement. The main south entrance to the building cannot be used at this time, due to the project, so the congregation is ushered in from the two north doors at the front of the sanctuary. This project will take some time to complete. We look forward to the improvements to our building!" Thanks, Perry! Perhaps we can get a photo while this is in progress.

### Music programs

It's now the time of year for special music programs—in the churches and in the schools. Here are just a few that were held recently.

The Doon Young People's Society hosted their annual Reformation Day Singspiration on November 7. Only this year, due to construction on Doon's church building, it was held in Calvary PRC in Hull. And, judging from a recent Hull PRC bulletin, it appears their young people did a special number.

"Joyful Praise with One Accord" (a quartet of young men) music night was hosted by the Byron Center Young People on Saturday November 20 at BC-PRC. The offering was to offset the 2022 YP Convention costs.

The junior high band and choir students from Hull PR Christian School and Northwest Iowa PR School held their annual combined program on Monday, November 22, at

Calvary Protestant Reformed Church. Refreshments and a time of fellowship followed.

Heritage Christian School Foundation's "Evening of Praise" concert was held on November 27 at Grandville High School auditorium. Afterward a dessert reception was also hosted there. Participants included Sam Bergman (piano), HCS's 3rd grade students, the Hope Heralds, the PRSO, and Voices of Victory. A wonderful night of praise was experienced by all who attended!

### Food for Thought

"I believe the forgiveness of sins. This does not mean that my struggle, my battle against sin is finished. In a sense it has just begun, for sin still wars in my members. That struggle I must carry on as long as I live, even to my dying breath. But grace abounds. According to the new man in Christ, I hate sin, can crucify the flesh, as painful as that is, and can in principle live a new and holy life before God.... In that confidence I can anticipate the coming of that great day of days when the great white throne will be set up. God who has begun a good work will surely finish it. He rewards His own work in me with His testimony, 'Come, thou blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.'"

~ Rev. C. Hanko,  
in the November 15, 1982 *Standard Bearer*  
(quoted in a Byron Center PRC bulletin)

## Announcements

### Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 2022 at 8:00 A.M., in Providence Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 11, 2021.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated 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 or 219.730.9876.

### Reformed Witness Hour

[reformedwitnesshour.org](http://reformedwitnesshour.org)

#### Rev. W. Bruinsma

December 5—Abraham Offers Up Isaac  
Hebrews 11:17-19

December 12—By Faith Isaac Confers the Blessing  
Hebrews 11:20

December 19—The Song of the Angels  
Luke 2:13, 14

December 26—God's Saints Preserved  
Psalm 37:27, 28