

The Standard Bearer

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The pale horse

Rev. Dennis Lee

Synods 2020/2021 and “in the way of repentance” (7)

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Satan’s labors against the little ones

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In memory of Prof. Robert Decker

Rev. Nathan Decker



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Meditation

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

The pale horse

And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Revelation 6:7-8

Are you conscious of the fact that God is executing His eternal counsel every day without fail? Do you know that powerful forces are at work causing Christ to come again and come quickly? These truths are set forth by powerful symbols that the apostle John was given to behold in a vision recorded in Revelation 4-7. In this vision, seven seals that sealed a book representing God's eternal decree are being loosed. When the first four seals are loosed, four horses of different colors—white, red, black, and pale—are unleashed. The word we consider here concerns the loosing of the fourth seal and the unleashing of the pale horse.

Its identity

Death! This pale horse is the horse of death! The Holy Spirit clearly and emphatically spells out this identity in a threefold way. To begin with, let us note that the fourth beast, which first appeared in Revelation 4 and calls to “come and see” the loosing of this second seal, was like a flying eagle, or more literally, a vulture. And the vulture, being a scavenger for food from dead animals, is a creature that signifies death. Then, there is the pale color of this horse, which is that of a yellowish-green color. Those of us who have been by the deathbed of loved ones and who have seen death will readily recognize that this is the color of death. Finally, and quite unlike the previous three horses, the rider of this horse is given a name: “Death”!

Then we read, “and Hell followed with him.” The word “hell” literally is “hades.” And that word has several meanings in the Bible. It can mean and has been translated “hell,” the place of everlasting punishment and death. But it can also mean and has been translated

as “death” or the place where the dead are buried, the “grave.” Here in verse 8 we have the idea of death and the grave: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and *the grave [not hell]* followed with him.” When one dies, he is buried in the grave, the place of corruption. Death is followed by the grave! That is what this pale horse and its rider brings with it: death and the grave. The pale horse and its rider represent that powerful force of death.

As powerful as it is, let's remember that this power has been given to the Lamb of God who alone is worthy to loose the seals of that book of Revelation 5, even our exalted Christ! We do well to remember this when we consider the rest of verse 8: “... and *power* was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.” Here, the word translated as “power” refers to a power of choice, or authority. Putting this altogether, while the pale horse of death has been given authority to kill up to a fourth part of the earth, the exalted Christ, by virtue of His death and resurrection, has been given control over it!

This means that there is victory—and not defeat—for Christians on the occasion of death! The wonderful words of the apostle Paul under inspiration ring out the resounding note and confirmation of the Christian's sweet victory over death in Jesus Christ: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 15:55-57).

Are you still struggling with the pain of losing a loved one who died in Christ? Know that the pale horse of death cannot hurt the Christian and rob him of comfort! For Christ has overcome death! He has authority over the pale horse and its power, now and forever! And He has transformed it to be a mere door for us into Father's house of many mansions (cf. John 14)!

That, however, seems not to be the only way the power of the pale horse is curtailed. For we are told that it has been given power to afflict only a fourth part of the earth at any one time. Why? What about the remaining

three-fourths of the earth's population? Here, we have to remember that, just like the three earlier horses, the pale horse is part of the loosing of the seals of a book that represents God's sovereign and eternal counsel, so that even this detail of the pale horse being allowed to take only a fourth part of the earth reminds us that it serves to fulfill God's plan and purpose! There is divine intent and purpose underlying the limitation of the pale horse to visit only a fourth part of the earth at one time. We will have more to say about this purpose a little later. For now, we will be brief and say that the remaining three-fourths of the earth, which is temporarily spared the power of the pale horse, serves to fill up the cup of iniquity, and in that way, hasten the return of Jesus Christ in judgment!

Only a fourth part of the earth are for the pale horse to take at any one time.

We cannot help but reflect on the word "only," can we? For a fourth part of the earth is still a massive number! Think of the millions who were killed by the plague in medieval Europe! Think of the sixty million who died during World War II! Besides, this pale horse operates in manifold ways to carry away the sons of men! It can work in cooperation with the red horse of strife and war and also with the black horse of poverty, greed, and financial struggle. Or it can work independently—through 'natural' death, death through hunger, death by old age, by sickness and disease, by natural disasters, and by animals, as these verses indicate. But we should also understand that the Holy Spirit is not being exhaustive here, for we know all too well that there are more ways to die: death through abortion, stillbirth, suicide, and so much more!

Its running

All this becomes clear to us when we consider its running through history. Do you not see the trail left behind by this pale horse and rider as it gallops through the sands of time? There is hardly a day in which this horse is not hard at work as it carries men, women, and children away! And death is no respecter of persons and their accomplishments. Whether or not one has accomplished much or little is of no relevance to the pale horse. For death puts an end to all of man's boastings and accomplishments! It separates him from all of his earthly possessions. Like a powerful tide of the ocean, it sweeps away all the sandcastles of his accomplishments, his possessions, his earthly reputation and yes, even his memory!

And it leaves no one untouched! Should the Lord continue to tarry, it will most surely visit us as it continues its unstoppable, unrelenting, ceaseless running through time and history! Indeed, at the end of the ages, the number of deaths caused by this pale horse

will increase. In Revelation 8 and 9, which record the opening of the seventh seal and the blowing of the seven trumpets of divine judgment, and which bring us to the end of history, we find that with the blowing of the first five trumpets, four angels will be unleashed and terrible natural disasters will fall upon mankind, and *a third* of them will perish. Here in Revelation 6, we are told that the pale horse has authority to take a fourth of mankind into the grave. Many more will die through the pale horse and its running as history moves to its end!

And as the death rate increases, the people of the world will rally behind one person, the Antichrist. This will cause the rise of Antichrist and his anti-christian kingdom. But ultimately, the higher rate of death brought on by the pale horse will also destroy the antichristian kingdom, as God executes His counsel through the exalted Christ, who through the pale horse will cause His and our enemies to die—and die so very quickly, in staggering numbers!

Its purpose

What is the purpose behind all this? Without knowing the purpose of the pale horse and its running, we will be fearful, restless, bitter, and bereft of comfort as the pale horse of death draws nearer to us and impacts us more and more within our sphere of earthly relationships and life. But when we know its purpose, we will have peace! We will have comfort! We will have hope, even joy as we see this pale horse more and more at work in our sphere of earthly life! For let's remember that it is not the devil but Christ who controls all things, including the pale horse. And God works all things together for good for all those who love Him! So, do you love Him?

The question is not the strength or weakness of our love for Him, but His great love for us and therefore His working together all things for your good and mine (cf. Rom. 8:28). Such is His control of the pale horse that He will cause it to bring about the swift return of Christ unto the glorification of our souls and bodies for life in the new heavens and the new earth!

He does that in at least three ways. First, through the running of the pale horse, the world fills the cup of iniquity and makes itself ripe for judgment. Second, it also delays the premature coming of the antichristian kingdom by cutting short the lives of powerful national leaders having the agenda of the devil. Third and finally, it purifies the church on earth. It rids the church of hypocrites and sanctifies the hearts of God's children by causing them to reflect upon their lives and to amend their ways. Dear reader, has not God used death to speak to you in such a way? God through His exalted Christ uses this pale horse for our good!

And so, we conclude positively, on a note of comfort and hope, but also with a sense of mission and purpose! For all we who belong to Jesus are allies of the triumphant white horse of the gospel. We are called to be witnesses of Christ unto the ends of the earth. And,

therefore, we are to be faithful in relation to the witness of the gospel, which alone can deliver people from the ravages of the red, black, and pale horses. May it be so with you and me!

Editor's note

Readers may remember Rev. Nathan Decker's article "Sexual abuse in the church" in the January 15 issue. Rev. Decker said about the article that even though it was "difficult to write" and "troubling" and "distressing" to read, nevertheless addressing the subject was necessary because the evil is present everywhere—not only outside but also inside the church. It is the judgment of the editors that it would be profitable for the churches if more

instruction were given on the subject. Painful though it is to all involved—and no one knows the pain like the victims—we plan to address the sensitive subject in the May 1 issue. We are in the process of planning this special issue and asking various writers to contribute. Pray that the subject may be treated in a manner that honors God above all and helps everyone in the very broad circle of those hurt by this evil.
—BG



Editorial

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

Synods 2020/2021 and "in the way of repentance" (7)

Remission in the way of repentance

As I promised last time, I will now explain what we mean when we relate repentance and remission with the phrase "in the way of." As the title to the series indicates, this gets to the heart of the issue.

First, when we say that we receive the remission (forgiveness, pardon) of our sins *in the way of* repentance we are *not* teaching that repentance is a work of man that *merits* or *earns* forgiveness with God, or that repentance is the *condition* for, *basis* of, *ground* of, or *procuring cause* of pardon. In fact, the language "in the way of" has been deliberately used in order to *deny* these erroneous conceptions.

Repentance could never be something in which we rest as satisfaction for our sin, the cause of our pardon, or the foundation of our comfort, because our best repentance is still a poor and imperfect act that of itself is sufficient to sink us into hell. Is your sorrow deep enough to propitiate God's wrath? Is your act of confession sufficient to pay for and cover in God's sight all your sins? Are you ready to ask God to forgive you on the basis of your repentance? Such ideas are inimical to

true repentance, because in true repentance there is absolutely no self-confidence but only self-condemnation: "Woe is me, for I am undone!"

Remission is always free and never earned by us in the repentance that precedes it. Only the death of Jesus can earn forgiveness with God. God does not forgive us because of our repentance, but because of Christ who came to take away our sin (John 1:29), was wounded for our transgressions (Is. 53:5), and in whose blood there is remission (Heb. 9:22, 26). Thus, from childhood's earliest days we were taught to conclude our prayers, especially our penitent petitions for pardon, with the words "for Jesus' sake."

Second, when we say that we receive the remission of sins *in the way of* repentance, we are *not* teaching that repentance is the instrument for receiving God's merciful pardon. Repentance has no receiving capacity. Faith is the sole instrument by which we receive. The call of the gospel is always "repent *and* believe," because it is by means of believing that we receive God's mercy in the declaration of our pardon. Thus Peter preached, "that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). We enjoy

God's mercy *in the way of repentance and by means of* (that is, *through the instrument of*) faith.

Third, when we say that we receive the remission of sins *in the way of repentance*, we simply mean that repentance is the necessary way in which, or the necessary path along which God, in His sovereign covenant love, is pleased to conduct us unto the personal experience of His merciful pardon. God eternally and wisely ordained our whole salvation from beginning to end. He ordained forgiveness for us; and He ordained repentance as the way unto that forgiveness. It is not God's will to take us from our sin and the 'pleasure' of it directly into forgiveness and its joy. Rather, He conducts us to forgiveness along the way of repentance. Why this way? Because it is only when we are, by the power of the Spirit, *in that way* of genuine, breast-smiting, self-abhorring repentance that we truly experience how dreadfully serious and hideous our sin is, how bitter its consequences are, how hopeless life without Christ is, how awful separation from God is, and how great is our need for mercy. If you do not know this way of repentance, you are to be pitied.

Fellowship in the way of obedience

The concept "in the way of *repentance*" must be related to and distinguished from "in the way of *obedience*." As was evident in protests to synod, confusion arises when it is *wrongly* assumed that repentance and obedience are one and the same, and that, therefore, the phrases "in the way of repentance" and "in the way of obedience" communicate the exact same meaning and can be used interchangeably.

Synod 2018 reaffirmed the proper relation between two things that God has joined together: 1) covenant fellowship with God, and 2) our obedience to the law in a life of good works. Synod drew the antithetical line between the truth and the lie by demonstrating that there are wrong ways to relate covenant fellowship and obedience. Positively, synod taught, "we experience covenant fellowship with God *in the way of* obedience."

With this language we mean that there is a spiritual way or path called "grateful obedience to God's law," and we enjoy walking in covenant fellowship with God and having assurance of our salvation *as* we are walking in that way of obedience, and *not* as we are walking in rebellion against God. As we pass through time, two things occur simultaneously in our life. We who are by faith united to Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, are 1) walking in communion with God and, because faith is always fruitful, we are 2) walking in obedience to Him. That path on which we walk with God could be called "the way of life."

When we say that "we receive remission in the way of repentance" we are also expressing a relation between two things God has joined together: 1) remission and 2) repentance. However, we do not merely mean that remission and repentance occur simultaneously (like fellowship and obedience), but we also mean that repentance *precedes* remission as *the way unto* it. We have always explicitly taught this. For example, in commenting on John Calvin's teaching that repentance is prior to forgiveness, Prof. D. Engelsma explains how repentance, without being a condition for pardon, is "necessary for forgiveness" and "the way to pardon."¹

The teaching that "remission in the way of repentance" includes the idea of repentance preceding remission as "the way unto it" has been a major point of confusion in protests to synod since Synod 2018. Consider what happened most recently at Synod 2021. Synod 2020 judged that the teaching of Scripture and the confessions is that, "we repent and in the way of repentance experience the mercy of God." A protest to Synod 2021 contended that this teaching is "diametrically opposed to" and "contradicts the decisions of Synods 2018 and 2019."² Synod 2021 rejected that claim and responded, "the statement of Synod 2020 is exactly in harmony with Synod 2018, which taught, 'Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant of God. 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.'"³ This statement from Synod 2018 very clearly teaches that while our good works of obedience are not the way back to the restoration of fellowship, repentance is. There has not been any contradiction in the decisions of our recent synods on the teaching of repentance. Our synods have consistently taught and defended on the basis of Scripture and the confessions that repentance is the necessary way to pardon and restoration. In other words, repentance *precedes* remission.

The Canons of Dordt

The Canons can help us here, especially with regard to our experience. Logically, in order of nature, repentance precedes forgiveness, even as sin, logically, in order of nature, precedes repentance. First sin, then repentance. First repentance, then forgiveness. However, experientially, in

¹ *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin* (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2009), 207-8. For synod's use of Calvin and Engelsma, see *PRC Acts of Synod and Yearbook 2021*, p. 122-23.

² *Acts of Synod 2021*, p. 119.

³ *Acts of Synod 2021*, p. 119.

order of time, we might not always experience repentance as preceding forgiveness, but might find repentance and forgiveness running side by side.

Here the distinction of the Canons between “sins of infirmity” (V, Art. 2) and “great and heinous” (V, Art. 4) or “enormous sins” (V, Art. 5) is helpful. Although all sin is in principle “heinous,” there are “sins of infirmity.” These sins are not planned and intentionally committed, but they suddenly arise in us because we regenerated believers are still so spiritually weak with a desperately wicked flesh cleaving to us. At any given moment there can suddenly arise within us a flash of anger, impatience, jealousy, pride, bitterness, or lust, even while we are praying or worshiping. This is our infirmity!

Therefore, in a normal, spiritually healthy Christian life when we are walking in the way of life, walking with God in fellowship on the path of obedience, our obedience is far from perfect. Due to our constant sinning, we are constantly repenting and constantly flying to Christ for refuge. Thus, the way of life, or the way of obedience, is always at the same time, the way of repentance. In that case it may be difficult to make a temporal distinction between our repentance and God’s merciful pardon, because repentance and remission run through our life simultaneously. Both are essential elements of the whole organic life of a healthy believer who is walking in the ways of the Lord. This ongoing life of constant repentance is captured in the Canons when it teaches that on account of “sins of infirmity” we are furnished “with *constant* matter for humiliation before God, flying for refuge to Christ crucified” (V, Art. 2).

However, when we are dealing with what the Canons call “great sins,” then we more readily experience that repentance precedes pardon. As an illustration, the Canons present David’s lamentable fall. Adultery and murder are not sins of infirmity that seemingly spring out of nowhere in the man who is happily walking with his God. There is a process that leads to the sin of taking another man’s wife or murdering another woman’s husband. David had set himself upon a very specific path of pride and self-reliance. He had gone off the path of life/obedience and into the ways of darkness. David was not constant in watching and prayer. He was seduced by and complied with the lusts of the flesh. He was thus drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world, and his own flesh. As a result of his sin, he very highly offended God, incurred a deadly guilt, grieved the Holy Spirit, interrupted the exercise of faith, very grievously wounded his conscience, and lost the sense of God’s favor for a time (Canons V, Art. 5). Not only that, he continued in impenitence and had the

bitter experience of God’s heavy hand of chastisement upon him (Ps. 32:3-4). David was not walking in communion with God. He was not walking in the way of obedience. He was not walking in the way of ongoing repentance. He had turned aside from the way of life and was walking in the dark way of rebellion, impenitence, and death.

There are times when a believer, though not necessarily guilty of committing the exact same great and heinous sins of David or of walking in continued impenitence, has committed some sin that feels great to him. The guilt is pressing heavy upon his conscience. He is miserable and feels wretched before God. Or he simply feels the enormous weight of all his sins in a very acute way, so that he has no peace of conscience. Or his internal spiritual life grows frigid as he drifts away from God and sets his affections on the things of this world. Such a believer is no longer walking in the way of life, the way of obedience, the way of ongoing repentance. He has slowly drifted off the path into the way of darkness and does not have a strong sense of the nearness and favor of God, and maybe no sense at all.

According to the Canons, such a believer does not experience God’s mercy in remission “until” he repents (V, Art. 7). The God who is merciful and pardons is the God who has ordained that forgiveness and the delightful experience of knowing His favor comes “in the way of repentance.” Only as God turns the sinner in genuine repentance does the sinner find forgiveness and enjoy restoration.

In Psalm 32 David very plainly describes this order as a matter of his personal experience. What believer does not sing Psalter 83 stanza 2 with David?

While I kept guilty silence,
My strength was spent with grief,
Thy hand was heavy on me,
My soul found no relief;
But when I owned my trespass,
My sin hid not from Thee,
When I confessed transgression,
Then Thou forgavest me.

The Canons teach that repentance precedes remission and the renewed experience of God’s favor. First, Canons V, Art. 7 states that God “by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God....” Here the Canons teach that the mercy of God in a renewed sense of His favor *follows* the repentance that He certainly and effectually works.

Secondly, Canons V, Art. 5 teaches that “by such enormous sins” believers “sometimes lose the sense of God’s favor for a time, *until* on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them.” The sinner does not experience God’s sweet favor and nearness as a covenant friend “until” God renews him to repentance so that he repents. What H.C. Hoeksema proposed as a better translation of the original Latin is interesting: “Until, having through earnest repentance returned into the way of life.”⁴ The Canons speak not

⁴ *Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 661.

of “the way of repentance” but “the way of life.” The “way of life” is the way of obedience and constant repentance, the way in which the believer walks with his God in sweet communion. For the sinner burdened by great sin, there is only one way back unto that path, only one way unto God’s merciful remission, and it is the way of repentance.

On the basis of Scripture and the confessions, the PRC has always taught what was reaffirmed by our recent assemblies: “We repent, and in the way of repentance experience the mercy of God.”

Next time a brief summary, concluding remarks, and significance.



All around us

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

Satan’s labors against the little ones

On a Saturday morning this past December, the smallest of adventures with my two-year-old daughter turned into a parental wake-up call. The adventure was her first trip to the local public library. Her eyes were wide; she had never seen so many books. She could not help but express her excitement (far too loudly for such a quiet space). After a brief lesson in library etiquette, I turned her loose to explore. I was excited for her and with her, ready to gather a stack of books to take home.

She made a beeline for a small table of featured books in the children’s section. The display was designed just for her. The books were written just for her. But it took only a few seconds for me to recognize the ungodly message of these featured books. All of the books on this display were addressing various social and cultural issues, and judging these picture books by their covers, the message was clear. They were promoting homosexuality, unnatural gender views, and other unbiblical ideas to toddlers.

Subconsciously, my first reaction was to keep her away, so I directed her to another shelf; there was no shortage of good options. After further reflection, that protection is not enough. The fact that the world’s agenda is pushed in toddler books confirms that the little ones are under attack already, and that it is never too early to begin preparing our children to stand fast

against the enemy. Satan is hard at work against even the smallest of our children using many means. Children’s literature is one of them.

Undisguised attacks

I suspected what I observed was not an anomaly. Not many days later, my suspicions were confirmed by an article shared on *The Aquila Report*: “LGBT Activists are Loudly and Proudly Trying to ‘Normalize Queerness’ in Children’s Literature.”¹ The author, Jonathan Van Maren, interacts with a pro-LGBT article about efforts to “normalize queerness” among children. Van Maren’s opening words get to the point:

This comes as no surprise to those of us who have been following the LGBT takeover of culture over the past decade or so, but it is still worth noting: Activists now feel comfortable enough to say the quiet part out loud. That is, as I’ve written in this space before, they are no longer pretending that the education (or re-education) of children is not the goal of their movement.

Their agenda is not new. Their boldness is not new.

¹ Jonathan Van Maren, “LGBT Activists...,” *Life Site News*, December 9, 2021. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/lgbt-activists-no-longer-hiding-their-goal-to-undermine-homophobic-parents-normalize-queerness-for-kids>.

Even targeting the next generation is not new. But now they openly admit it.

Christians and non-Christians alike recognize the importance of the early years for every aspect of a child's development. Non-Christians (in this case, the LGBT activists) have no intentions of letting the opportunity slip. Here is Van Maren's summary of the LGBT approach:

It is important, Prasad [the author of the pro-LGBT article—DN] writes, not to “perpetuate” the “generational prejudices that we inherit from our elders.” In other words, certain views of sexuality and gender are outdated and must be dispensed with. It is the task of educators to ensure that parents *do not pass their beliefs on to their children*. An important aid in that, Prasad says, is children's literature, which has the power to “endow their young readers with lifelong values.” That is to say, lifelong LGBT values. Books with LGBT themes, she says, can promote “LGBT+allyship.”

A Christian response, at bottom, includes both protection for children and the preparation of children. Constant watchfulness is required wherever the world has an avenue to our children (personal interactions, screens, books). Yet it is equally important that as parents, to the utmost of our power, we ground our children in the truths of God's Word, and that we do perpetuate those truths to our children *early* and *often*. Thus saith the Lord, “And thou shalt teach them [the words of God] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:7).

The aggression and boldness of the world should also create some urgency in our individual and collective efforts to write, publish, and promote children's literature that instills biblical truths and values in the hearts of our children. My personal observation of recent efforts to that end, including by the RFPA (rfpa.org), are as encouraging as the world's efforts are frightening.

Evolving standards

One of the challenges of protecting and preparing our children to withstand the attacks of the devil is that the world's standards are constantly evolving. The standards of morality for the modern world change so rapidly, one can hardly keep up.

Carl Trueman commented on this cultural trend in a recent post:

Years ago, when teaching at seminary, I used to tell the students that moral relevance in the modern world was a cruel and fickle mistress. However much Christians

accommodated themselves to her demands, sooner or later she would want more. Christian morality and the morality of the world simply could not be reconciled in the long term.²

He goes on to argue that as a consequence of critical theory, the world can hardly live up to its own standards of morality from week to week—not even in pop culture. What is lauded and adored one day is decried, condemned, and deconstructed the next. In the end, Trueman makes the reasonable claim that the world has “no agreed upon moral compass and [is] marked by a deep suspicion of any attempt by one group to make its truth normative, out of fear that the result will be oppressive and unjust.”

So this is another aspect of the challenge for Christians, both with regard to ourselves and our children. Not only must we be on guard against what the world is teaching today, and how the Devil is tempting and attacking us and our children today, but we must be on guard against the very framework of it all. Evolving standards of morality will give way to a rejection of any standard of morality, and every man will do what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6). Christians who hold fast to the unchangeable standard of God's Word will increasingly be the most prominent targets.

It is almost impossible to keep up with a thorough understanding of the latest fads of culture and society, but we and our children will find rest, safety, and stability in the abiding truth of God's Word. Through the operation of His Spirit, we and our children are also equipped to discern what is right, what is good, and what is true in every age.

Aggressive legislation

Not only is Satan laboring to teach our children and undercut the divine standard of truth and morality, but one can also observe his efforts in the world to separate children from the influence and oversight of their parents. This is the effect of recent legislation in California, signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom.

According to CBS News,

The legislation requires that health services plans or insurers accommodate requests for certain information to remain confidential when receiving these services, or if disclosure of information would endanger the patient. *Patients seeking sensitive services will no longer be required to get prior approval from the insurance policyholder or primary subscriber, and information about the procedure will not be allowed to be shared*

2 Carl Trueman, “The Strange Fate of *Hamilton* and *Harry Potter*,” January 6, 2022. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/01/the-strange-fate-of-hamilton-and-harry-potter>.

with anyone other than patient without approval.³
[emphasis added]

The summary is in need of explanation. What are these sensitive services? Greg Burt of the *California Family Council* explains that the bill (which was sponsored by Planned Parenthood)

prohibits insurance companies from revealing to the policyholder the “sensitive” services of anyone on their policy, including minor children, even though the policy owner is financially responsible for the services. These “sensitive” services include abortions, sexual assault treatment, drug abuse and mental health treatment, cross-sex hormones, puberty blockers, and sex-change operations.⁴

3 Li Cohen, “Governor Gavin Newsom declares California a “reproductive freedom state” with new legislation,” CBS News, September 23, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gavin-newsom-california-reproductive-freedom-state-legislation>.

4 Greg Burt, “Governor Signs Bill to Hide Minor Abortions, Transgender Drugs from Parents,” *California Family Council*,

Under the guise of freedom, the state of California essentially declared to parents, *Although you must pay the bill, you are not allowed to know what services doctors and insurance companies are providing to your children.*

If California is setting the direction of earthly government moving forward, it underscores the importance of making our children’s spiritual development our chief priority, as early as we can, and with much prayer. The temptation to hide something “sensitive” from parents is appealing to our children, especially when they are fearful or ashamed. Prepare them to face those temptations. Teach them what is good and right. Pray with boldness according to the promises of God. And be assured, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (I John 4:4).

September 22, 2021. <https://www.californiafamily.org/2021/09/governor-signs-bill-to-hide-minor-abortions-transgender-drugs-from-parents>.



A word fitly spoken

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

Grass

One of the fleeting pleasures of life is the feeling of soft new grass between your toes in the springtime. As much as we take for granted the green carpet God created on the third day (Gen. 1:11), its fresh dew-covered blades make it the picture of life and prosperity. Thus, the coming of the messianic kingdom to the psalmist is “like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth” (Ps. 72:6). And the life-giving doctrine of God’s prophet drops “as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass” (Deut. 32:2).

Yet, *fleeting* is an apt word for this ubiquitous creature that withers to nothing in the same day that it sprouts (Ps. 90:6). The grass is the point of contrast against all that is lasting and eternal. Where the Word of the Lord is forever, and the being of God more ancient than the mountains and earth, “the grass withereth” and “the flower fadeth....” A good metaphor, then, for the experience of seventy or eighty years languishing in labor

and sorrow under the curse. Saith the prophet, “Surely the people is grass” (Is. 40:7, 8).

The comparison of the people to grass is more than just a metaphor, however. Grass was, and remains, an important source of sustenance and livelihood. Long before modern city-folk spoke of “grass-fed” cattle, the agrarian Israelite knew that the “ox licketh up the grass of the field” (Num. 22:4). Whatever sort of gargantuan creature behemoth was, Job was not at all surprised to hear God reminding him that it also “eateth grass as an ox” (Job 40:15). The wild ass too will not bray when he has plenty of grass to eat (Job 6:5). Yet the hind will forsake her calf if there is no grass (Jer. 14:5).

If man ever imagines that he is self-reliant and self-sufficient, there is nothing better than a famine of grass to disabuse him of such a notion. It may be a famine from the drying up of all fountains and brooks, as in the days when Ahab searched the valleys and hills

of Israel looking “for grass to save the horses and mules alive” (I Kings 18:5). It may be famine from the locust and grasshopper who makes an end of “eating the grass of the land” (Amos 7:2). However it comes and whatever its cause, the famine of grass has a way of exposing to man his own weakness and dependence.

Which is why famine is often the Lord’s vehicle of choice for inflicting judgment on man and his pride. Let’s not forget *why* Ahab was searching high and low for grass in Israel (see I Kings 17:1). Let’s not forget either what the salt and brimstone of God’s wrath did to the green fields of grass around Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23). Far worse will be the days when the fire and hail of God burns up a third part of the trees, “and all green grass” (Rev. 8:7). Even worse still shall be the days when, by the demonic locusts from the abyss (Rev. 9:4), grass is bypassed in order to inflict pain directly upon “those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.”

The Lord has other ways to bring down the pride of man, however, and sometimes there are special cases. Such as Nebuchadnezzar, whose kingdom was like a tree giving shelter to the birds of heaven and shade to all creatures. Yet the tree shall be cut down, and his portion shall “be with the beasts in the grass of the field” (Dan. 4:15). No doubt, ours is a God “who resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (I Pet. 5:5). What utter wickedness, then, when human beings attempt to reverse this order. If you want to know the exceeding sinfulness of sin, look no further than Israel

changing their glorious God “into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass” (Ps. 106:20).

Grass is not all for death and judgment, however. Though the days of man are “like the tender grass,” the child of God sings unflinchingly of the “unchanging... love of God, from age to age the same” (Ps. 103:15; Psalter #278). He takes his seat upon the “much grass” residing at the feet of the King (John 6:10) in order to behold the wonders that accompany His gracious coming “like copious rain in times of dearth” (Ps. 72:6; Psalter #198). He does not worry what he shall eat or what he shall wear in days of scarcity. For if God clothes the grass of the field more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory, “shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matt. 6:29, 30).

Be not afraid, then, of the wicked, who seem to spring up as easily as the grass (Ps. 92:7). In the scope of eternity, they are nothing more than “the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up” (Ps. 129:6). Be not overcome with sorrow, when the burden of sin makes your heart feel like “the shadow that declineth” or to be “withered like grass” (Ps. 102:11). Rather take heart and be of good cheer! Look up and have hope! When your Christ comes, He shall make the inhabitants of His city to “flourish like the grass of the earth” (Ps. 72:16). And though the wrath of this King may be as terrifying as a roaring lion, you shall find that His heavenly favor is “as dew upon the grass” (Prov. 19:12).



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA

Jonah's gourd

So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

And it came pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and

perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Jonah 4:5-11

Having turned his back on God (Jonah 4:4, 5) and left Nineveh, Jonah stayed around to watch “till he might see what would become of the city” (v. 5). We do not know what Jonah expected, but perhaps he thought God would destroy Nineveh after all. Perhaps with his bad attitude he did what we so often do and went outside the city to wallow in self-pity and self-justification as if his sulking would somehow prove that he was right and God wrong to spare the city. The latter seems more likely in view of God’s final word to Jonah: “And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” (v. 11).

Whether he stayed the full forty days of his prophecy we do not know either, nor do we know when, after he was finished preaching, he was taught the lesson of the gourd. It would seem from the passage that it took place shortly after he left the city. Whatever the time frame, Jonah was in need of another lesson, a lesson that lasted two days (v. 10).

Scripture does not even tell us whether Jonah repented of his mercilessness, his back-talking, his rebellion against God, his complaining and sulking. We believe he did in light of his former prayer, but Scripture says nothing about it. We do not even read of his return to his own country, if he did return, or of any continued work as a prophet. Jonah disappears from the Word of God at this point; not surprising, because Jonah is not the focus of the Word but only an instrument God used to show His marvelous and sovereign grace. The great God of grace and mercy is the central figure of the book.

After leaving the city, Jonah went to the east side of Nineveh, for the east was traditionally the direction from which God came for judgment and for salvation: “And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory” (Ezek. 43:2). The tabernacle and later the temple faced east for that reason. Perhaps that is evidence that he was still hoping God would destroy Nineveh; but there he built his booth, there he waited, and there he learned the lesson of the gourd.

Many identify the “gourd” as the castor-oil or castor-bean plant, a fast-growing vine with large leaves,

but we do not know if it was a plant that still grows in that area. Its sprouting and growth were a miraculous work of God, and the plant may only have been seen that one time before disappearing forever. The identity of the plant is of no account. What matters is the word of God to Jonah, “Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” (vv. 10, 11).

Jonah felt more pity for the gourd than he did for the citizens of Nineveh, including 120,000 children and many beasts. What an example he is, in his hatred of Nineveh, of the need for God’s word in Micah 6:8: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God!” What a shame it is for us when we have more feeling for some creature than for those who are perishing under the wrath of God. How like Jonah when we wish death and destruction on those who have in some way injured us, while we fawn over a beloved pet. “Love your enemies,” Jesus says, “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:44, 45).

That there were 120,000 small children in Nineveh who could not “discern between their right hand and their left hand” is further proof that Nineveh was indeed a great city. On the basis of that figure some estimate its population as a million people. That God showed mercy to children magnifies His mercy as does His salvation of these Gentiles, for the children were unable to understand Jonah’s preaching or to humble themselves in repentance.

Finally, though, it is not the number of small children in Nineveh, the number of its citizens, or their character that makes God’s mercy greater. For the greatness of His mercy is measured not by the number or character of those to whom He shows it, but by the *source* of that mercy in the coming and work of Christ and in the *undeservedness* of His mercy. That He for Christ’s sake shows mercy to one lost sinner, great or small, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, is as wonderful as His showing it to a million citizens of a great city.

Rather than having the same pity toward Nineveh that God had toward the city, Jonah was consumed

with hatred for Nineveh and eaten up with bitterness for what Nineveh had done to his own nation. Jonah did not even have the same pity for Nineveh that God had for him, stubborn and rebellious as he was, when God made the gourd grow: “And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief” (v. 6). Pity for Jonah’s physical discomfort did not rouse any pity in Jonah for Nineveh’s spiritual condition. How shameful!

The Word tells us that Jonah was glad, very glad, for the shade the gourd gave. That is the first time in the story of Jonah and Nineveh that Jonah was glad about anything. Unhappy with his calling, grudging the repentance of Nineveh, angry at a merciful and gracious God, he is a sad example of how we so often become trapped in a sinful and bad attitude, are negative about everything and everyone, and will not be corrected. We must realize then, that our self-pity, our anger and frustration, our stubbornness and persistence in our sin are directed against God, as Jonah’s anger and frustration were. God keep us from such evil!

Anger at the circumstances of life, often of no more account than a gourd plant, is anger with God and sin against Him, for it is God who arranges all the circumstances of our lives as the same sovereign God who granted repentance to Nineveh. Great sin it is, too. Jonah’s problem was that God had not done what Jonah wanted either in Nineveh or with the vine. How foolish and how wicked even to think that we have any right to dictate to God or think that He must do what we want and to be angry when things do not go our way. Our prayer must always be, following the saving example of Christ Himself, “Not my will but thine be done.” And that prayer must be offered cheerfully and in humble submission to God.

We may assume on the basis of Luke 11:30, which calls Jonah a sign to the Ninevites—a sign that pointed to the saving work of Christ—that Jonah did repent of his sins. His prayer in the belly of the fish leads to the same conclusion, but the Bible does not tell of it. Yet we should not be too hard on Jonah, for how often are we not like him—in spite of clearer revelation—full of self-pity, consumed by hatred and bitterness, refusing to accept God’s ways when they are hard, unbending in the face of His sovereignty, rebellious, if not in speech then in mind and heart, fuming over what we do not like and cannot change.

What makes Jonah’s lack of mercy a greater sin is the mercy God showed Jonah himself. The growth of the gourd was itself mercy, a miraculous display of mercy that was entirely undeserved: “And the LORD God pre-

pared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd” (v. 6). Laughing at Jonah’s efforts to find some shade for himself by building his poor “booth,” the Lord shows how much better is His own mercy by causing the gourd to grow.

The heat of the sun must have been brutal if Jonah’s hut alone was not enough to shelter him. But God sent a worm to destroy the gourd and an east wind off the desert because Jonah needed another hard lesson. Sadly, we read that though Jonah fainted and wanted to die, he did not repent of his bad attitude, his bitterness and hatred, and his lack of mercy. Rather, he argued with God and, wallowing in self-pity, insisted that he was right and God wrong.

God showed mercy to Jonah, too, when the gourd died, teaching him a lesson and rebuking him only very gently: “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” God remembered that Jonah (and we with him) are but dust and did not deal with him as he deserved but showed His great mercy (Ps. 103:8-14). Even that did not move Jonah but only produced an angry reply: “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” There was not only a worm destroying the gourd but a worm eating away at Jonah’s soul, the worm of bitterness and self-pity from which he needed deliverance. He is an example of what Hebrews 12:15 warns against: “Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.” So God showed Jonah his own need for God’s sovereign mercy in sending the worm, and demonstrated the sovereignty of His mercy to Jonah by taking the gourd away, just as He had miraculously given it.

The lesson God gave Jonah, however, was not just about Jonah’s lack of mercy but about God’s sovereignty in all the works of His hands. He emphasizes that to Jonah by speaking to him of the fact that the gourd grew without any effort on Jonah’s part, meaning that just as the life of the gourd was in His hands, not in Jonah’s, so also was the life and eternal well-being of Nineveh’s citizens. Just as Jonah had nothing to say about the growth and death of the gourd, so he should have had nothing to say about God’s dealings with Nineveh.

In His sovereign mercy God chooses some and not others. Sovereign in salvation, He sends His Son to die for some and not for others, and gives faith and repentance to those only for whom Christ purchased those blessings. Sovereignly He saves some we would rather see perish and does not save others for whom we have often agonized and prayed. We have no right to question His ways, to complain of them, to charge Him with injustice, or to insist that He ought to have done oth-

erwise: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Rom. 9:20, 21).

In His sovereignty He chose, too, to use a Jonah for the salvation of Nineveh, as He does always, both when He uses weak and sinful men to preach the gospel, and under the preaching to save those who from a human perspective are least deserving of His mercy. For “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence” (I Cor. 1:26-29). And lest we think that we are more than foolish, weak, base and despised, the Word of God tells us that this is “our calling” (I Cor. 1:26).

God shows us the sovereignty of His mercy in all the circumstances of our lives, both giving and taking away as it pleases Him, but always making all things work for our good and for the glory of His eternal Name. He shows the sovereignty of His mercy in saving us, the weak and despised of this world, and in using us, wretched and miserable creatures that we are, in His service and for the good and coming of His kingdom. All glory be to Him. He shows us the sovereignty of His mercy in saving us by the weakest of means, the preaching of the gospel and the gospel preachers.

The lesson must eventually have gotten through to Jonah but, in the concluding verses of Jonah 4, God is still speaking to a man who had not humbled himself before God and before the sovereignty of His mercy, but was still arguing, complaining, rebelling, and replying against God. Is He, in the book of Jonah and by the lesson of the gourd, speaking to you as one who has bowed or as one who is still stiff-necked and unhappy because God’s way is not your way?



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, former PRC home missionary and now pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Protestant Reformed Missions Years of trial: Missions threatened: 1947-1953 (5)

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2021, p. 88.

Tensions were running high! It was the talk of the churches. Is God’s covenant conditioned on faith or is it unconditional and rooted in election? The Protestant Reformed Churches and her ministers were divided on the answer to this all-important question. Would Arminianism be injected into the truth of God’s covenant, resulting in a “semi-Arminianism,” or would the truth of God’s sovereignty in salvation prevail?

The Mission Committee set in motion the events that resulted in the actions of the Synod of 1950. At its August 8, 1949 meeting (Article 15) the Mission Committee requested “Rev. H. Hoeksema to prepare a

brief and concise testimonial concerning our position as Protestant Reformed on the covenant, to be published in pamphlet form.” This never happened. But it is clear from this decision that the Mission Committee was of a mind to have something definitive written about the Protestant Reformed view of the covenant—not just a short statement but a pamphlet. At its April 1950 meeting, the Mission Committee decided to recommend to synod that it “give expression as to what is binding for membership in our churches.” One of the grounds was, “we [the men of the Mission Committee] have no right to make such a declaration for our churches.” Perhaps

this is why H. Hoeksema never wrote the desired pamphlet for the committee as a declaration for the PRC.¹

The secretary of the Mission Committee prepared the request that it then presented to Synod 1950. Keep in mind that this request of a synodical committee directly to synod in no way violates Article 30 of the Church Order. It is perfectly legitimate for a committee appointed by synod to address her recommendations directly to synod. It had happened many times prior to this synod and it is a practice that continues to the present. The request was simple: “Your committee requests Synod to draw up a form that may be used by those families requesting organization into a Prot. Ref. congregation. We believe that this would serve to remove all misunderstanding and aid toward unity.”²

In answer to this request, the committee of pre-advice appointed by synod to bring recommendations moved that the following “form be used by groups desiring organization as Protestant Reformed Churches, and that it be forwarded to consistories for consideration.”

To adopt the following clear-cut expression as one which should appear in each request for organization, along with the denial of common grace and the Three Points of 1924, and profession of adherence to the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordrecht and professing the Scriptures to be the infallible Word of God (as stands to reason). “The promise of the Gospel, both as to the will of God to save His people and the execution of His will to save them, is not general, that is, it does not include all the baptized children of the church, but it is particular, that is, it pertains only to the elect of God.”³

This statement addressed the issue at hand. But it was judged deficient by the synod. It was lacking; it did not explain enough. More issues were involved in the debate, one of them being, Is the covenant conditioned on faith or not? Besides, the immigrants of the Liberated Churches in Canada needed to understand—it needed to be proven to them—that the Protestant Reformed position on the covenant was confessional. These immigrants were genuinely confused. They were hearing from the missionary and other PRC clergy that the Lib-

erated view of the covenant was perfectly acceptable in our churches. It was time that the PRC take an official position on the covenant! The unconditional view of the covenant and the conditional view of the covenant—two diametrically opposed positions—could not stand side by side in the PRC. There can be no blending together of two doctrines that flatly contradict each other, even though many PRC ministers and consistories at that time felt there could be.

It became evident to Synod 1950 that it was not fair to the Liberated immigrants that the PRC vacillated on this matter when the delegates read a sample letter submitted to synod from a Dutch immigrant by the Mission Committee. Evidently, the Mission Committee was receiving many more letters of the same sort. We include this letter as evidence of the confusion the churches were creating by not taking a well defined official position.

Reverend Gentlemen:

In early September of this year I arrived here as an emigrant with my wife and child. My wife and I were confessing members of the Reformed Church maintaining Art. 31 of the Church Order, and our young son a baptized member.

I still have in my possession the certificate which was handed to me by our consistory when we left; it is addressed to: the congregations in Canada.

To this day I still have not been able to decide to which congregation of the church of Christ in Canada I should deliver it.

You know, that it is almost impossible for us as Liberated Reformed to endorse the doctrinal decisions of the Christian Reformed Church, and to become a member of this ecclesiastical fellowship, thereby bearing responsibility for the mistakes and sins that were committed in the past and have still not been corrected.

I knew this before my departure from the Netherlands and have even grown in that knowledge since coming here. At the time, my decision was already fixed and I was intending to request that you accept my certificate, so that I would not be a “wanderer” and could be placed under the oversight and discipline of the Protestant Reformed Church. However, in the meantime some things have happened and have been written, of which I am aware, and that has made the decision even more difficult for me. My decision was based on the advice and the authority of our own spiritual leaders in the Netherlands, whose advice entailed that we as Liberated emigrants should turn to the Protestant Reformed Church, where we could feel “at home” and where there would be no “binding.”

1 Minutes of the Mission Committee, April 11, 1950, Article 11. Take note of the terminology used by the Mission Committee. First, the committee did not desire a simple statement but a brief, concise testimonial in pamphlet form. Second, the Committee desired this testimonial to be a *declaration* for our churches. Both of these requests were satisfied by the 1950 Synod in her “Declaration of Principles.”

2 PRC Acts of Synod 1950, p. 54, Art. 63.

3 PRC Acts of Synod 1950.

We are in a very isolated position. There are several kindred spirits (Liberated) over here, however, all are members of the Christian Reformed Church in Vancouver. As far as I know we are the only Reformed people around Vancouver that have not found a “home” church.

You understand that this is very difficult for us and is becoming even more so since comments have already been made several times from the Christian Reformed side.

So it is for the above mentioned reasons that I turn to you and request counsel, advice, and if possible maybe even some help in our position. Please, and as one of the most important points, I would like to receive clarification whether you would hold a former member of the Liberated Reformed Church to your views of the Covenant and Baptism when admitting them into the Protestant Reformed Church as a confessing member, or should they not expect any binding from you in those matters.

Awaiting your responses, with prayers and best regards.⁴

This immigrant desired church membership, but it was “one of the most important points” in his estimation that he would not be forced (bound) by our churches to concede that the covenant was unconditional. He wished to be a member but maintain his view on conditions. Taking into account the uncertainty of the immigrants, the Mission Committee’s desire for an official declaration of our view on the covenant, and the mixed-message we were emitting as churches, it was wise that the synod moved to resubmit this matter to the committee of pre-advice for better formulation. The two professors, H. Hoeksema and G.M. Ophoff, were added to the committee. During the closing hours of synod on Monday night, June 12, an eight-page document entitled “A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches” was presented by the committee of pre-advice for approval by synod. This document was approved with only one dissenting vote.⁵

The results of this decision would have far-reaching repercussions for the mission work of the PRC. In the year to come Dr. K. Schilder and the Liberated Churches of the Netherlands threatened to cut off all official dealings with our denomination. Under this threat, the Dutch immigrants in Canada no longer sought affilia-

tion with the PRC. It also resulted in the PR churches in Hamilton and Chatham, Ontario leaving our denomination. Hamilton even went so far as to depose Rev. Herman Veldman on the grounds of heresy.

From a thriving mission work in Canada to nothing. The hopes and dreams of a fruitful, vibrant mission work in Canada came to a grinding halt.

But all things work together for the good of Christ’s church. The “Declaration of Principles” was exactly what the PRC needed at this time in her history. The mission work of our churches was threatened by compromise. The truth of sovereign grace was under attack. Compromise of the truth is never the way to church growth. The *Declaration* has served our denomination well. Not only does it clarify the truth for our sakes. The truth expressed in this document is settled and binding on our churches. But it also serves to direct the mission work of our churches. The unconditional covenant God establishes only with His elect people in Christ is an outstanding truth of God’s Word of which we all should be aware. If you have not read the “Declaration of Principles,” take time to unearth it and read it for yourself. It is short and easy to understand.⁶ Also, be sure to read Prof. D. Engelsma’s book, *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant*, published by the RFP. A.

The adoption of the “Declaration” by the Synod of 1950 was only provisional, as is evident from the following decision:

1. That synod subject this entire document to the approval of the churches.
2. If no objection is offered, to adopt this at our next synod.
3. To adopt this in the meantime as a working hypothesis for our mission committee and for our missionaries in the organization of churches.⁷

This decision gave the PR churches a year to digest what was soon to become the official doctrinal position of our churches regarding the unconditional covenant. Ministers, consistories, and the membership of our churches were given time to study and discuss the confessional basis for the unconditional covenant as set forth in the “Declaration” in order to come to an agreement concerning the truth.

The decision was proper, but the spirit of unrest, discontentment, and distrust had already become firmly entrenched in the churches. The ministers in the churches were sharply divided. About half the men were indeed

4 This letter was written in the Dutch language. Much thanks to Prof. Brian Huizinga for his accurate translation into English.

5 *PRC Acts of Synod 1950*, pp. 83-90, Articles 116, 117. See also David J. Engelsma’s book, *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (Jenison, MI: RFP. A., 2013), 18.

6 *The Declaration of Principles* is found at the end of the Church Order book, and on pages 412–431 in the green book entitled, *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*.

7 *PRC Acts of Synod 1950*, Art. 117, p. 90.

convicted of the unconditional covenant. But the other half had swallowed the Liberated view of the conditional covenant. They would not admit this but their rhetoric later proved it. Their writings in the *Concordia*, their letters to the *Standard Bearer*, and their sermons reflected the covenant view of the Liberated. This history is recorded for the interested reader in several books available from the RFP. The question of interest for the purpose of our articles is: Where was the Mission Committee after all of this?

It was business as usual. Despite the unrest that the “Declaration” caused among the ministers, despite the fact that work in Canada all but ceased, the Mission Committee took up its labors as usual. The minutes do not reveal any discord among its members. Rev. A. Cammenga continued in his labor as missionary along with Rev. W. Hofman, with no complaints. The only

matter brought up was the publishing of the “Declaration” in the Dutch language, which later was deemed unnecessary since Dr. Schilder published it in *De Reformatie*. Scanning the minutes of the Mission Committee over the next two years reveals no indication of a divided denomination. This is surprising since three out of the five ministers on the Mission Committee, Rev. B. Kok, Rev. J. Blankespoor, and Rev. H. De Wolf would later become outspoken advocates of the doctrine of the conditional covenant. This is also surprising since the two present missionaries would later defect from the rank and file of PR ministers.

We hope to consider the labors of the Mission Committee during these trying times in the next article. Perhaps this will also give us a glimpse into the controversial Synod of 1951.



In memoriam

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan and nephew of Prof. R. Decker

In memory of Prof. Robert Decker

As I reflect upon the gift of God that Prof. Robert Decker was to the church of Jesus Christ, I write this article in memory of him from two perspectives.

First, the man known to the churches as Rev. Decker, and later as Prof. Decker, was to me always and only “Uncle Bob.” I am the youngest son of Prof. Decker’s younger brother, and because of our relative ages, many who did not know our family well would often assume that Prof. Decker was my grandfather. My memories of Prof. Decker are those of a nephew. It is fitting that I pen this article right after the holiday season, for it was time spent in my youth at Decker family gatherings from which many of my memories of Uncle Bob come.

Second, I write this from the perspective of one whom God also called to the gospel ministry. Some of the memories of my Uncle Bob for which I am most thankful were those that come from the time I was considering pursuing the ministry of the gospel. I went to him seeking counsel. He would listen. He would encourage. He would help. He manifested his pastor’s heart and wise counsel to me through the struggle and process of preparation for the ministry of the gospel, for which I was and still am very thankful.

Prof. Decker was born on August 10, 1940 to Peter and Dorothy Decker in East Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was baptized as an infant by Rev. Herman Hoeksema in First Protestant Reformed Church. He remained a member there until being ordained in the ministry in 1965. He attended Baldwin Christian School through fifth grade, completing his grade school education at Adams Street Christian School. In 1958 he graduated from Grand Rapids Christian High School. He then continued his schooling at Calvin College and, believing the Lord called him to pursue gospel ministry, thereafter attended the Protestant Reformed Theological School. Prof. Decker was ordained into the ministry of the gospel in 1965. He served two Protestant Reformed churches:



Doon PRC from 1965 to 1969 and the PRC in South Holland, Illinois from 1969 to 1973.

The Lord was pleased to give Prof. Decker a faithful wife, Marilyn Poelstra. They were married on August 18, 1961. Prof. Decker always made it known very clearly the tremendous help that his wife was as he labored in the ministry of the gospel. She was also a gift of God to the churches, not only as a faithful helpmeet to her husband but also as a Christian school teacher during many of the years Prof. Decker labored in the seminary. The Lord gave Prof. and Marilyn Decker four children, one daughter, and three sons, all of whom married in the Lord. Together they enjoyed 59 years of marriage. He died and was brought home to glory on May 5, 2021 at the age of 80.

Prof. Decker was a gifted preacher. He was not a tall man, standing no taller than 5 feet 8 inches, yet he had a commanding presence behind a pulpit. This was not on account of his natural ability chiefly, but because it was evident he was filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ to preach the gospel with conviction. But that is not to say he did not have ability. The Lord qualified him with the gift to teach, which shined through in his pulpit ministry. His sermons were exegetically sound, clear, and organized, applied to the everyday life of the sinner-saint, and delivered with an evident love for the people of God in the pew. God's people were always fed with a solid meal from the Scriptures under Prof. Decker's preaching.

Prof. Decker loved to preach. He always considered it his primary work as one called by God to the ministry, as every preacher does. And he loved to preach about preaching. As long as I have a sound mind, I will remember the deep baritone voice of my uncle booming forth the words of I Corinthians 1:21 in a sermon on the text: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." He knew what was taking place when Jesus Christ speaks through a human instrument whom He has called. He told me once how, while typing his sermon on 3x5 note cards (every sermon filling up eight or so cards in outline form), he was filled with eager anticipation for the upcoming Sunday. He was excited and thrilled for the opportunity again to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. He loved Jesus Christ, who is the gospel, and dedicated his life to unfolding the glorious riches of that gospel through the word preached.

Prof. Decker was a compassionate pastor. That he had a pastor's heart came through clearly in his preaching ministry. The manner in which he preached the Word of God was such that it spoke to the people of God in their particular trials and circumstances of earthly

life. This compassion also came through clearly in his pastoral ministry. He thoroughly enjoyed and considered it a great privilege to be an instrument in the hand of God to visit the sick, comfort the mourning, and help the depressed. He was a pastor who himself understood intimately and personally the struggles God's people endure in this valley of tears. According to His sovereign will, the Lord laid upon him very dark and difficult days of depression during periods of his ministry. But through those times he knew the Lord was faithful, never forgetting and never forsaking His people in Jesus Christ. And the Christ, whom Prof. Decker knew was faithful in those dark days, was the Christ he would bring to help others in their time of need.

Prof. Decker was a faithful professor. The Lord called him through the churches to be professor in the Protestant Reformed Theological School. He labored full time in that position for 33 years, from 1973 to 2006, the year of his retirement. The churches recognized the gifts God gave him for preaching and pastoring, calling him to dedicate his life to the task of teaching men to preach and to pastor, which was the focus of his teaching as a professor of practical theology. I write this article sitting in my study, surrounded by shelves of books that give evidence of his work as a professor of practical theology. Graciously he gifted me much of his library upon his retirement, such that I have a wealth of resources from him in the area of practical theology.

I did not have the opportunity to sit under his teaching in the seminary. In light of that, I spoke to a colleague who did. There is one point gleaned from this conversation that I would like to share. The students always enjoyed when Prof. Decker would go "off-topic." In fact, they would try, as pupils do at times, to lead him in that direction. But the motive was not wrong, because they always knew the gems of instruction that would arise from these discussions. What is striking is how this memory of him as a professor in a classroom is similar to my memories of him as my uncle in a living room. He had a wealth of historical knowledge of our churches. He had a fantastic memory of people and places and events. And the anecdotal stories he told were not only interesting, but instructive. He was a man who served the churches as one who lived among and knew the people of God, and God used those experiences for the edifying instruction of his students throughout the years.

Uncle Bob is now in glory, experiencing the perfect and sinless joy of being with his Savior. He is with Jesus Christ, whom he knew personally as his Savior and Lord. He is with Jesus Christ, to whom he faithfully led God's people and whom he trained men to proclaim

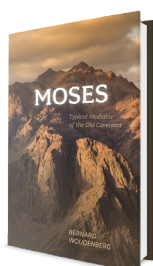
as ministers of the gospel. He is with Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself to the death of the cross for the salvation of His church. As part of that church and knowing himself to be a sinner saved by grace, Prof. Decker knew that the only way of serving Him was in self-less love and humility.

My Aunt Marilyn asked me to read a brief biography of my uncle at his funeral. It included a portion of a letter written to him from the late Rev. Gerrit Vos. Vos' words, written as counsel to Prof. Decker in his first

year of the ministry, were remembered by him throughout the entirety of his life. They are fitting words to conclude this short reflection on the gift of God that Prof. Robert Decker was to the church of Jesus Christ: "Of all the things I counseled you, remember this, be humble. There is a humility that is feigned. That is abominable in God's sight. Be humble from the heart and God's people will bear you up in their arms."

May God be pleased to continue to give His church humble and faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

Bring the books...



Moses: Typical Mediator of the Old Covenant by Bernard Woudenberg. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association. \$27.95, 282 pages, Hard cover. [Reviewed by Rev. Matt DeBoer]

The way this book reads reminds me of being told engaging Bible stories in catechism about Moses by an experienced minister. Rev. Woudenberg (now deceased) tells the story of Moses' life in a way that is easy to read, and he teaches doctrines that come out of those stories in a way that is simple to understand for adults and teenagers. The great thing is that while the minister in catechism has limited time and thus must tell the stories with less detail, the author of this book has the space to tell the stories with fascinating detail.

Each chapter of the book begins with a quotation of a Scripture passage, which the author then uses to tell the true stories of Moses' life. Woudenberg begins by describing Israel's bondage in Egypt under Pharaoh, helping the reader sense what that would have been like for the people. Then he tells the story of Amram and Jochebed and shows how they felt while hiding their baby Moses from the Egyptian authorities. Throughout the rest of the book, the author speaks mainly from Moses' perspective, revealing what he was thinking and feeling during the events of his life. For instance, Woudenberg causes the reader to see how Moses must have hurt when the Israelites rejected his initial efforts to lead them out of Canaan, what he was learning while tending to sheep in Midian, and the struggles of leading the Israelites through the desert to Canaan. Sometimes the characters of the Old Testament seem so distant from us today, but Woudenberg makes it easy to relate to Moses and understand what he went through.

While telling the stories of Moses' life, the author emphasizes the doctrine of God's sovereignty and beautifully shows that the Almighty God makes all things work for the good of His people. For example, when telling the reader about Pharaoh allowing his daughter to spare one of the Hebrews and bring him into the palace, Woudenberg writes, "What Pharaoh did not realize was that behind that one seemingly insignificant exception was the will of Israel's God. Moses, the child drawn from the river, would rise up to put to naught all of the boasting of that evil kingdom" (12). Later, in describing the plagues, the author states, "They were a means of revealing the power of God; they were a means of hardening the heart of Pharaoh and thus revealing the power of God; they were a means of bringing about the deliverance of Israel from Egypt; but, more than anything else, they were a testimony of God's righteousness and mercy that would work in the hearts of his people through all generations" (79).

Also, as Woudenberg tells the stories about Moses' life, he wonderfully points the reader to salvation in Christ. He shows how God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea is typical of Christ's deliverance of His people from sin. He also teaches how Moses was a type of Christ. For instance, while telling the reader how Moses faithfully and lovingly prayed for the people after they had worshiped the golden calves, Woudenberg explains how the ascended Christ faithfully and lovingly prays for the sinful members of His church (152).

In this book, I read many things about Moses and Israel that I had not considered before and thus I certainly grew in knowledge. Most importantly, the book often reminded me how great Jehovah is and how merciful He is to His people. I was edified, and so will you be in reading this new book.

In light of recent events in our churches, there is an increasing awareness of the great evil of abuse, including the verbal and physical abuse of spouses as well as the sexual abuse of children. While such awareness is a good thing, it is necessary that we continue to grow in our understanding of these issues. In his recent speech for the annual meeting of the RFP, Prof. B. Huizinga encouraged his listeners to read, study, and grow in the area of understanding abuse. Following in that vein, I offer the following brief reviews of two books on abuse. I recommend them both as a possible place to begin in studying these important issues.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma



On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church by Deepak Reju. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014. 210 pages, paperback.

This book focuses on the sexual abuse of children, particularly within the context of the church. Reju serves as Pastor of Biblical Counseling at Capitol

Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. As a Baptist, he takes a different view of the children of believers than we do as Reformed believers, but his book is still worthwhile.

The first section of the book is entitled “Getting Familiar with the Problem of Child Abuse.” The chapters in this section are helpful in setting forth basic facts about childhood sexual abuse. Especially helpful are his chapters on “The False Assumptions We Make” and “Type, Techniques, and Targets of Sexual Predators.” He also spends a chapter showing why many sexual predators specifically target churches in their hunt for prey.

In the second section of the book, Reju lays down practical strategies that churches ought to take to try to prevent the sexual abuse of children in the church building and at church functions. Consistories could profitably read this section as they give consideration to the protection of their little lambs, even in such practical matters as nursery policies or the construction/remodel of a church building. Though directed to churches, this section would also be profitable for school boards to read as they seek to protect the children in our Christian schools.

The third (and shortest) section of the book deals with how a church responds after abuse has taken place. There is good advice for consistories here on reporting

the abuse to the civil authorities, caring for the abused, keeping the congregation informed, and laboring with the abuser.

At the back of the book are a number of helpful appendices. I found to be especially helpful “Child-on-Child Sexual Abuse” and the “Child Abuse and Neglect Training Sheet.” And the appendix on “How Do I Talk to My Kids about Sexual Abuse?” ought to be required reading for all parents. That section alone is worth the price of the book.



Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault by Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. 270 pages, paperback.

Justin and Lindsey Holcomb are a Christian couple with considerable experience dealing with abuse, Justin as a pastor and Lindsey as a counselor. They have previously co-authored a book seeking to help those who are victims of spousal abuse, and in this book they focus on providing help for those who are victims of sexual assault.

The first section of the book explains in detail what sexual assault is, making the case that sexual assault is not just being raped, but includes any form of nonconsensual sexual contact. There is also an explanation of the destructive effects of sexual assault on body, mind, and emotions.

The second section of the book addresses some of the major struggles that the abused experience: denial, distorted self-image, shame, guilt, anger, and despair. These struggles are not only described, but carefully addressed with the Word of God. Interspersed between the chapters are the heartbreaking stories of individuals who have been sexually assaulted, giving the reader a bit of a sense of what they have experienced and what they continue to struggle with. I found this whole section to be especially valuable.

The final section of the book is theological in nature. The authors develop the concepts of sin and grace, with particular application to sexual abuse.

There are two brief, but helpful, appendices in the back of the book: “Ways You Can Help a Victim” and “What to Say and What Not to Say to a Victim of Sexual Assault.”

This book would be especially helpful for those who have been sexually abused, as well for those who seek to care for the abused, although all can learn much from it.

Report of Classis East

Providence Protestant Reformed Church hosted Classis East's January 12, 2022 meeting. The meeting convened with Rev. Joe Holstege, chairman of the last meeting, leading in devotions. He made opening comments about loving the church of Jesus Christ. Two delegates from each of the nineteen churches of Classis East attended in person, including the two delegates from Wingham, Ontario, Canada. After Rev. Holstege declared classis properly constituted, Rev. Bill Langerak took over the chair.

With Rev. Langerak presiding over the meeting, classis received reports from its stated clerk, church visitors, and classical committee. Then classis took a break from meeting in session to allow the committees of pre-advice to get to work.

Two overtures were brought to classis. Classis rejected both of them. A classical study committee had its advice regarding suggested changes to the Rules of Classis East regarding the work of the stated clerk recommitted. Classis gladly received news from Unity PRC that the consistory of Wingham PRC has been reconstituted and the congregation reorganized (under the oversight

of Unity's Consistory). A consistory sought and received advice from classis to increase censure in two discipline cases. Classis approved a pulpit supply schedule for Grace and Hudsonville PRCs from February through May. The expenses of classis totaled \$2,782.

Classis elected men to serve as church visitors, on the classical committee, as synodical deputies from the East, and for Synod 2022. The following men were elected as *primi* delegates to Synod 2022: Revs. N. Decker, R. Dykstra, G. Eriks, R. Kleyn and W. Langerak; Elders Mike Gritters, James Lanting, Sid Miedema, John VanBaren and Dan VanUffelen. *Secundi* delegates to Synod 2022: Revs. W. Bruinsma, J. Mahtani, M. McGeown, J. Smidstra, C. Spronk; Elders Dave Bouwkamp, Gary Boverhof, Vern Haveman, Doug Pastoor, and Tim Pipe, Jr.

Classis' next meeting will be held, the Lord willing, on May 11, 2022. It will be hosted by First PRC of Holland, MI in the building of Redeemer Christian School in Beaverdam.

Rev. Clayton Spronk,
Stated Clerk of Classis East



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which church has had a special church history class for her junior high students for 28 years? (Keep reading!—answer under congregational news)

PRC news (denominational)

Minister calls

On January 9 Heritage PRC extended a call to Rev. R. Barnhill (Peace PRC, Dyer IN) from their trio that included Revs. E. Guichelaar (Randolph-WI PRC) and J. Marcus.

On January 16 Hudsonville PRC voted to call Rev. R. Barnhill from a trio that included Revs. M. Kortus and J. Laning (Hull PRC, IA).

In January Doon PRC announced a trio of Revs. J.

Holstege (Zion PRC, Jenison, MI), D. Kleyn (missionary to the Philippines), and M. Kortus (Hope PRC, Redlands, CA). On January 16 Rev. Kortus received this call.

Rev. J. Langerak will preach his farewell sermon at Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD) on February 13. He and his wife Sarah plan to move to Spokane that week, where he will take up his labors in Covenant of Grace PRC. Plans are for him to be installed by Rev. R. Hanko on February 27.

Missions

Philippines: In his January Philippine mission newsletter, PRC missionary-pastor R. Smit gave this encouraging news about an aspect of their work that had to be paused due to the pandemic: "Our work in southern Negros Occidental [SNO] has been on hold because of

travel restrictions. This situation is beginning to change with the government recently allowing fully vaccinated travelers to SNO. Of course, there is a list of rules that travelers must follow in order to visit, but at least the door is opening again for a resuming of our mission labors in SNO in 2022, D.V.”

PRC news (congregational)

Georgetown (MI) PRC: On February 2 “Marriage Re-Formed” was held at the church, a speech and discussion presented by Rev. Garrett and Jen Eriks. Deserts and fellowship followed the presentation.

Grandville (MI) PRC: For 28 years a church history class has been taught to 7th and 8th-grade students. For many of those years the focus has been on PRC history. According to the current instructor, Mr. Doug Dykstra, the purpose of the class is threefold: “1. To help our young people appreciate our God-given Reformed heritage; 2. To help our young people recognize the vital importance of preserving the Reformed truth; 3. To encourage our young people to both live and promote the Reformed truth now and in the future.” The class meets from September-April after the morning service. Mr. Dykstra adds these thoughts in a letter he sends to the parents: “As leader, I have found the study of our denomination’s history to be profitable, enjoyable, and encouraging. It is my hope that this study will build up our young people and give them zeal for the Reformed truth that they will carry with them into and through adulthood.”

Hope (MI) PRC: Prof. C. Griess has taken over (from Prof. R. Dykstra, who took it over from Prof. H. Hanko) leading the Monday Night Class for young adults. They are currently studying the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3. What a wonderful tradition this class has become for our young adult members and friends!

Providence (MI) PRC: According to a recent bulletin, “the building committee has added a wireless printer in the copy room and signage for several other rooms, and the women’s restroom and the nursery have been painted.” Another sign of good stewardship with regard to the Lord’s possessions.

Southwest (MI) PRC: The Young People’s Society just completed a sub sale that included more than mere subs! Beginning January 17 young people contacted members about ordering subs, croissants, or cinnamon rolls—with “a variety of combinations available.” Delivery was made on February 15. Proceeds helped defray the costs of this year’s YP’s Convention. How could one resist?! Good food, good cause!

Wingham (ON) PRC: Rev. D. Holstege was installed on January 9 with Prof. R. Dykstra leading the service.

We join the saints there in praising God for the provision of another undershepherd to feed them with the Bread of life.

Evangelism Updates

Byron Center PRC’s sermons had an impressive on-line witness last year. Her Evangelism Committee reported this in a January bulletin: *Our SermonAudio account had 41,261 total plays this year [2021]. We reached all 50 states and all the continents except Antarctica. Our sermons were listened to in many countries from Peru to Kazakhstan to Zambia to Fiji. SermonAudio is great tool for evangelism and spreading the gospel throughout the world.*

PRC Sister-church news

This update on Covenant ERC’s (Singapore) Kolkata (India) mission work was given in a January CERC bulletin:

The Session has some updates from our dear Missionary and Pastor Singh. By God’s grace, our dear missionary has been faithfully holding regular worship services at 5:00 P.M. on Sunday. Because of the distance many have to travel just to enter into the rest of the preaching of the word, many saints come and stay at Pastor’s Singh’s place on Saturday night. On Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, Pastor Singh leads a Bible study on the doctrine of salvation. On the 25th of December, CERC Kolkata had a Christmas gospel meeting. 30 newcomers were brought by God’s providence to hear the gospel of sovereign grace. There was diligent follow up with those who attended. Tracts distribution in marketplaces and metro stations have begun. Witnessing to others of Christ by individual members of the church was done together with a distribution of 10,000 Gospel tracts. On 26th December, [two persons] were baptized at CERC Kolkata. Let us join our brothers and sisters in thanksgiving to God in this significant event. ...Please continue in prayers for our Foreign Mission Committee as they labour diligently in providing support to our Missionary Pastor Singh. Pray that the COVID situation will not hinder, but be used by God for the spread of the gospel. Pray for many members who are the only Christians in their homes, pray for faithfulness to the precious Reformed faith.

And Covenant PRC (Ballymena, Northern Ireland) placed this notice in her bulletin recently: “Sign up for the 2022 British Reformed Fellowship family conference at Castlewellan Castle in Northern Ireland from Saturday, July 9, to Saturday, July 16. The speakers, Prof. David Engelsma and Prof. Brian Huizinga will lec-

ture on ‘Union With Christ.’ For information see the website (<http://brfconference.weebly.com>).” We certainly hope and pray that this can be held yet this year!

The second semester of the **PRC-Philippines’ Seminary** began on January 18 (same day as the PRC Seminary in Wyoming, MI!). The plan was to hold face-to-face classes in the seminary library in Beverly Hills, Antipolo. We pray for “Professors” (missionaries) D. Kleyn and R. Smit as they give this instruction once again.

PR Christian school activities

Adams CS (Wyoming, MI): Adams hosted their annual Soup Supper in the gym on February 10, from 5-7 p.m. You could also preorder the soup through their website for pickup from 2-7 p.m. If you’ve never been to this soup smorgasbord, you’re missing a true culinary delight!

Eastside CS (Grand Rapids, MI): The Junior High held a “Take-and-Bake Pizza” fundraiser on February 5. The pizzas could be picked up freshly baked or frozen for later consumption. The school also held their annual online auction on February 9.

Trinity CHS (Hull, IA): On January 31 the annual Trinity Promotional Supper was held. After the meal a short program was put on by the Junior/Senior Choir.



With this issue of church news we begin a new feature—**PRC church libraries**. In the January 15 issue I noted that I am asking you to submit a photo of your library and a brief description of it. Since I have not yet received any (keep in mind we work a month in advance with the *SB*), I decided to feature my own church’s—Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

The library of Faith PRC has been in existence for many years, with a dedicated room in the southwest corner of the building. It is operated by a special committee of the Council (Sarah Decker, Dorothy VanDerSchaaf, and Mike VanTil) and contains a variety of books aimed at the adult readers in the congregation: commentaries,

church history titles, Bible study aids, and more. As you might guess, it is well stocked with RFPA titles. But there are also books for teenagers and for children, including a special basket of books for the very young!

If you ever visit Faith PRC, be sure to check out her library—it’s a fine one!



Faith PRC (Jenison, MI) is the host of this year’s PR Young People’s Convention, which has the theme “Rejoicing in Our God,” based on Psalm 63. Plan to join us August 1-5 at the Cedarmore Camp and Conference Center in beautiful Kentucky to experience an unforgettable, spiritually uplifting time with our young people. Most of the young people have not had a convention since 2019 and many will be unable to attend another after this! Registration will begin in March. Visit the PRYP C website (prconvention.com) regularly for updated information.

The Faith PRC Program Committee is **looking for special numbers from PR Young People’s Societies**—group or individual performances are welcome! Contact Jessica Van Dyke at jessicavd11@gmail.com.

Food for Thought

“We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is ‘of him.’ If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects that he might learn to feel our pain. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if im-

mortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the

power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.”

(John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.19)

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC in Walker express their Christian sympathy to Pastor Jon Mahtani and Keri and their children in the death of Keri's grandfather, **Mr. Neal Pastoor**. May they be comforted in the words of Jesus Christ “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

Jeff Kalsbeek, Vice-President
Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express our Christian sympathy to Terri and Steve DeVries, Erika and Bryan Kiel and family, and Matt and Kalista DeVries and family in the death of Terri's mother, **Mrs. Dorothy Hettinger**. “I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

Rev. Dennis Lee, President
Tom Verbeek, Clerk

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Redlands, CA on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Redlands' Consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2022-2023 academic year should make application at the March 17, 2022 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the seminary's website (prcts.org).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 17 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the
Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

Joel Minderhoud, Secretary

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.