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Confessing our sins

Herman Hoeksema

Synods 2020/2021 and “in the way of repentance” (8)

Prof. Brian Huizinga

A child's confession of his Lord

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Personal devotions as communion with God

Rev. Jon Mahtani



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Meditation

This meditation was originally written by Herman Hoeksema in Dutch and entitled *Onze Zonden Belijden*. It can be found in the July 1, 1939 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, and has been translated by Prof. Brian Huizinga.

Confessing our sins

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I John 1:8-9

This is the message!

John has a message, tidings.

For he has heard, his eyes have seen, he has looked upon, and his hands have handled that which was from the beginning, the Word of life, the Life, the eternal Life which was with the Father and is now revealed.

Therefore he has tidings.

He must speak.

And the heart of the matter, the center of the message that he with the other apostles declares to the church in the world about Him, the Life that they have seen and with their hands have touched, is that God is light and that in Him there is no darkness at all. That is what it is about. Everything is concentrated in that. From this follows everything that John has to declare. God is the eternal Good, the perfect, overflowing Fountain of all good, the True One, the Righteous One, the Holy One, the Faithful One, the Gracious One, and in Him is no wickedness, unrighteousness, or lie. There is no darkness in Him at all. He is the only Wise One, who knows and loves Himself in the light!

Therefore we must go to Him!

To the light!

Only in that light do we have fellowship with Him, and in that fellowship we share in life. For if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie. But walking in the light, we have fellowship with Him and with each other.

Walking in the light!

Also now. Also in this world. Even now while we still have only a small principle of this obedience, and in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells no good thing.

Walking in the light, also with our sins!

For if we walk with our sins in the darkness, then we say that we have no sin.

But if we walk in the light, we confess our sins.

And there in the light we find forgiveness!

For He is faithful and just! With Him there is always forgiveness!

This is the message!

Confessing our sins!

Difficult—for the flesh, impossible—a demand contrary to our sinful nature!

It means first of all, that we “say that we have sin!” Exactly the opposite of what we do when we walk in darkness. Then we say: We have no sin!

Confessing is “saying that we have sin,” not as a part of our dogmatics but as an acknowledgment of the heart. Oh, in a doctrinal sense we know it very well, and we say it easily enough: We have sin. We oppose the proponents of perfectionism who teach that the regenerated, converted, sanctified child of God is able to live without sin in this life. As Reformed believers, we find such a saying much too superficial. He who judges this way does not see deeply enough, does not know his own heart, is satisfied with the superficiality of life, does not see the evil of his corrupt flesh, and does not take sin seriously enough. He is in danger of falling into all kinds of sin. And in order to maintain the truth, we should readily call upon this text, for it plainly teaches that whoever says that he has no sin deceives himself and the truth is not in him. And we strongly oppose such a superficial saying, because even the holiest, so long as he is in this life, has but a small principle of this obedience.

No, no, we must have nothing of that superficial perfectionism!

In a doctrinal sense we say it heartily: We have sin!

But oh, how completely different it so often is when this truth must be applied to us personally, when it applies to very specific sins committed by us that are pointed out with the finger, and when we come before the demand to acknowledge them, to say that we indeed have committed those concrete sins. Perhaps we have

lied and slandered, or made ourselves guilty of backbiting; we have cheated and disadvantaged the neighbor; we are at variance with the brother and we do not want to yield. And God's Word comes to us with the demand of confession. We are reminded of our sin. We are admonished. We are reminded of this word of the Scripture: If we confess our sins, but only then, do we taste the faithful God who forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. And we immediately set ourselves to prove that we have no sin! Or we seek to explain away our sin. Or we call attention to the brother and how he also has guilt. And so we seek all kinds of excuses to escape the trap of the truth regarding the *concrete*, while we so readily confess the *abstract*.

Our flesh never says it: I have sin!

And yet this, and nothing else, is the meaning in the word of the text. It is not just about the confession of the truth, but about the acknowledgment of personal guilt.

And in this sense confession of sin is saying that we have sin.

Saying it *with God!*

Confession of sin is not just a saying, a mere acknowledgment, a consent that we have sinned. Even the world can still do that. Even in the tents of wickedness you can sometimes hear the language of those who loudly proclaim their iniquities, who take pleasure in all kinds of filth, and who openly boast of things that are even shameful to speak about. One gives an open testimony to all the iniquities he commits while in fellowship with the devil!

That is the meaning of the word in the original, a word generally used in Holy Scripture, and also here for "confession." It means: to testify with someone; to say the same thing as someone else; in this case, to say the same thing about our sins as God says.

We are in God's covenant! We are of God's party. We walk in the light! And so standing in God's covenant, being in God's party, and walking in the light, we see our sins, we acknowledge our sins, we say about our sins what God says!

Then we hate our sins as God hates them.

Then we condemn our sins as God condemns them.

Then we find ourselves damnworthy before God, as God, on account of our sins, finds us damnworthy outside of Christ. Then we long for forgiveness, as God wills to forgive our sins in Him who has loved us. Then we humble ourselves in dust and ashes.

And we cry out, "Have mercy on me, the sinner!"

We *confess* our sins.

Wonderful power of the truth!

For only if the truth is in us do we ever come to the deed of confession.

We are ruled either by the truth, or by the lie.

But not by *a* truth or by *a* lie; but by *the* truth and by *the* lie.

The truth is that God is an eternally good God; that He is *my* God and *my* eternal good, that He is light and in Him is no darkness at all; that He is to be desired above all; that to love Him with all my heart and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength is life; that His favor is better than the choicest foods, and His kindness than life; that He is to be served

and thanked and praised forevermore, that only in the light can I behold light, and walking in the light can have fellowship with Him.

And the lie is diametrically opposed to this.

It is the evil, willful, spiritual-ethical denial of God as *God*, the refusal to say *my* God and *my* good; the attempt to say: I shall be as God; self-exaltation, enmity, rebellion against Him, the seeking of wealth far from Him; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, the love of darkness.

The lie!

By nature we are governed by that lie. It is in us, in our heart, and from our heart in our thinking and willing and desiring. It is a spiritual-ethical power that governs us from the inside out, and in a spiritual-moral sense always causes us to say: We have no sin!

And if we say that, then we deceive ourselves.

Terrible self-deception!

Unspeakably great folly of lies!

We deceive ourselves! Not God, against whom we think we can exalt ourselves; not the neighbor, against whom we have maintained our lies, saying that we have

We are in God's covenant! We are of God's party. We walk in the light! And so standing in God's covenant, being in God's party, and walking in the light, we see our sins, we acknowledge our sins, we say about our sins what God says!

Then we hate our sins as God hates them.

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...Then we long for forgiveness, as God wills to forgive our sins in Him who has loved us. Then we humble ourselves in dust and ashes.

And we cry out, "Have mercy on me, the sinner!"

not sinned; also not ourselves in the sense that we do not know that we have sinned. The wicked shall never succeed in this. God will rise up in justice. He testifies of Himself, that He is a good God, He witnesses also in the conscience of the sinner: you have sin, you are guilty and damnable. But he deceives himself, because he does not want and does not seek God, and while he intends to maintain and exalt himself against God, and seeks wealth, happiness, honor, and greatness outside of God, he turns himself to the darkness, he seeks the outermost darkness, he moves himself down the road to eternal damnation, he rushes to destruction!

So it is in the absolute sense with the natural man, in whom there is no truth.

He is always governed by the lie and he deceives himself.

He always seeks his own destruction!

And so it is in a relative sense with us, with God's regenerated children; so often they walk after the flesh.

Then they subject themselves to the power of the lie. Then they do not confess their sins. Then they say that they have no sin. Then they turn themselves unto darkness. Then they flee from the face of God. Then they seek wealth far from Him. Then they eschew the light. Then they do not find the cross; then they taste no forgiveness; then it becomes dark in the soul....

While I kept guilty silence,
My strength was spent with grief,
Thy hand was heavy on me,
My soul found no relief.¹

Yet, wonder of God's grace! The truth is in us!

It is in our heart, a power, a spiritual propulsive-force. It controls us from within. It enlightens our minds; it converts the soul; it changes the will; it causes us to long for the light, for God, for His favor, His kindness, His righteousness; it fills us with the desire to please Him, with godly sorrow, with heartfelt repentance for our sins....

And we say that we have sin!

And we confess our sins!

And we no longer deceive ourselves, but turn to the light!

And in that light we find the faithful God, the cross, the resurrection, forgiveness, salvation, eternal peace....

But when I owned my trespass,
My sin hid not from Thee,

When I confessed transgression,
Then Thou forgavest me.

Wonderful power of truth!

Lovely fruit!

Thou dost graciously take it away!

Completely away! For, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness!

Forgiveness and cleansing! The guilt is completely taken away—that is forgiveness! The stain of unrighteousness is completely taken away—that is cleansing! I am damnable and God does not damn me, for He does not impute sin to me—that is forgiveness! I am defiled and under the dominion of sin, and God liberates me—that is cleansing! I am an object of wrath, and God grants me His favor—that is forgiveness! I am in bonds of sin and death, and God breaks the bonds and gives me life—that is cleansing!

Forgiveness and cleansing—inseparably connected together!

Connected in God, for without forgiveness we have no right to His cleansing; He sanctifies us because He has justified us. And also connected in our own consciousness. For without an inner longing for sanctification, we have no desire for forgiveness. Whoever says, "Forgive!" must also say, "Cleanse me!"

Forgiveness and cleansing—never to be separated in the confession of our sins!

No, not as if we by the confession of our sins make ourselves worthy of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God. God does not forgive and cleanse us because we confess, that is, on the ground of our confession. No, only because He is faithful and just does He forgive the confessor and cleanse him of unrighteousness. He is the Faithful One, that is, He does what He says; He gives what He promises; He keeps the covenant; He fulfills His eternal Word! And He is the Just One, that is, His will is always in accord with His perfect being, and His doing with His righteous will. And His eternal Word is: I forgive the confessor, My child, his sins. And His justice is that He has blotted out our sins in the blood of the cross.

But only *in the way* of confession can we receive that forgiveness and cleansing!²

Then we hunger and thirst and are satisfied!

Then we seek and we find!

Then we see God's friendly face in the light!

Unspeakable bliss!

¹ Here and in the next quotation below, Hoeksema quotes from Psalm 32, stanza 2 in the Dutch *Psalmen* book. I give the English from number 83 in our Psalter rather than a translation of the Dutch, because in going from Dutch to English the rhyming is lost.

² Emphasis is Hoeksema's.



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” (8)

A summary

With this article I conclude my treatment of the doctrine of repentance. I have used the Scriptures to explain and elaborate upon the decisions of our recent synods. The synods responded to protests expressing opposition to the doctrinal teaching that “we repent and in the way of repentance experience the mercy of God.” What follows are a handful of positively stated biblical propositions for a simple summary of the whole series of articles:

- Repentance is a sorrowful turn from sin unto God in seeking forgiveness.
- Repentance is commanded by God; you must repent.
- Repentance is the God-ordained way to forgiveness; therefore, we enjoy God’s merciful forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s atoning work, through the instrument of faith, and in the way of repentance.
- Repentance is a gift of God, earned by Christ, and sovereignly and graciously worked by the Spirit, so that what God commands of all He graciously gives to His elect at His appointed time.
- Repentance always manifests itself in the unmistakable fruits of an amended life.

The issue in the protests

The issue in the protests to synod was a matter of *order* regarding God’s way of repentance. The protests rejected the *order* taught in Scripture and the confessions, the *order* of Proverbs 28:13 as it was taught by a minister in a sermon on that text, the *order* defended by the consistory, classis, and consecutive synods. The protests made *order* the issue and in so doing rejected the teaching that repentance precedes forgiveness as the way unto it, that is, the teaching that “we repent, and in the way of repentance experience the mercy of God.” The protests contended that repentance cannot *precede* God’s merciful pardon, but must *follow* as fruit. Even though Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy,” the protests argued that the preacher may not explain such a text to mean that the

penitent believer’s God-worked activity of confession *precedes* God’s merciful pardon. If repentance is “A” and forgiveness is “B,” then according to the protests, A cannot come before B, otherwise the preacher has taught “the lie” that presumably makes God in His pardoning mercy dependent upon the believer in his repenting. Moreover, the assemblies pointed out that, more broadly, the protests denied that *any* God-worked activity of the believer can precede a blessing of God.

As I have demonstrated from Scripture and the confessions, God has ordained repentance as the way unto pardon. By His sovereign grace God brings us to genuine repentance and in that way of repentance we experience the mercy of God as He pardons our sins. This is God’s way, God’s order, and how God is pleased to work. This was David’s own experience as expressed in Psalm 32.

The underlying issue

What underlies the protests is a misguided zeal for the sovereign grace of God in salvation, resulting in a rationalistic approach to Scripture. Rationalism is the belief that the true knowledge of God is derived from the mind of man and his natural reasoning rather than the Word of God. When rationalism encounters Scripture, it takes conceptions of the human mind and imposes them upon the Word of God. A rationalistic approach to the question of the order of repentance and forgiveness goes like this: “In my mind I do not believe that repentance can precede God’s mercy in forgiveness; otherwise repentance becomes a condition for salvation and makes God’s activity of forgiving dependent upon the believer’s activity of repenting, which then elevates man above God and allows man to take some credit for his salvation.” Rationalism then imposes that conception of the human mind upon the Word of God. Consequently, the plain teaching of Scripture is denied, people of all ages are left confused, and the preaching of the Word is protested as false. Rationalism will not let God be God and teach us His way of repentance.

Zeal for God’s glory is necessary and commendable,

but it must always be “according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2). When our zeal is not according to the truth of God’s infallible Word, then it is misguided and we in effect attempt to out-zeal or out-orthodox God Himself, thereby negating His Word. The irony of a rationalistic approach to God’s way of repentance, or any other aspect of the doctrine of salvation, is that one ends up committing the very error he set out to oppose. Rationalism puts man before and above God by elevating man’s mind above God’s Word. God has ordained repentance as the way unto forgiveness and He has made that very clear in His infallible Word. To that we must humbly submit and that we must faithfully teach.

The work of the synods

First of all, regarding the doctrine of “in the way of repentance,” Synods 2020 and 2021 set forth no new teaching. As is always the case in the context of error, there is a sharpening of our understanding, and an opportunity to explain and clarify our historic teachings. But the synods did not establish any new doctrinal teaching, emphasis, or perspective. There was something new at these synods; it was the teaching contained in the protests. The synods simply reasserted the old paths of the truth that we have known, confessed, and experienced from our youth, and in so doing defended the Word of God and the preaching of it.

The second thing to note about the work of the synods is that in recent years God has tested the churches with error coming from two directions. God has also been gracious in granting to the broadest assemblies of the denomination sound judgment to handle these protests correctly for the defense and promotion of *God’s way*.

In the years leading up to and climaxing in Synod 2018, the unconditional covenant was being threatened by teaching that gave to our good works of obedience a place and function they do not have in the covenant. An error appeared that made our keeping of the law in good works of obedience part of the way unto the fellowship of the Father. The synod declared that our good works of obedience to the law are not the way of access unto God, for that way is exclusively Christ and His perfect works. Rather, our good works of obedience are the way of grateful conduct in the covenant, so that enjoying covenant fellowship with God by faith in Christ we bring forth fruits of thanksgiving. Synod defended and promoted *God’s way*.

In the years following Synod 2018, God has also graciously given subsequent synods the sound judgment to defend and promote *God’s way* in another sense, and

not to react to the earlier errors in fear by overcorrecting and thus negating the teaching of God’s Word. As I have explained in the eight articles of this series, the second error denied repentance as God’s way to pardon. Again God was gracious to give to the synods knowledge and conviction to stand with His Word.

While synodical decisions on protests may not win universal thanksgiving, as the work of a synod seldom does, the objective pursued by the ecclesiastical bodies was accomplished by the grace of God: do the work of the Lord faithfully by rendering righteous judgments in accordance with God’s Word and the explanation of that Word in the Reformed confessions. In that way God is honored and His blessing is enjoyed in the churches.

Practical significance

Would not the theology of repentance and forgiveness contained in the protests to synod radically alter our practice if synod were to adopt that theology and we were to believe, confess, and apply it? If the theology of repentance and forgiveness is that repentance may not precede forgiveness but must always follow forgiveness, then consider how different our approach to sin would be. Think only of the consistory room where the elders are working with an impenitent sinner who persists in gross misconduct and rebellion.

There are two approaches. First, the elders can apply to the impenitent sinner the truth of God revealed in Scripture, the confessions and the Church Order, namely, “forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration in the way of repentance.” Or, second, the consistory can apply to the impenitent sinner an alternative approach “forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration, then repentance as the fruit.”

If the consistory applies the first approach, they will labor for *repentance*. The prayer of the elders is that they may be able to receive the sinner’s genuine repentance, and reconcile and restore him to the fellowship of the church. The elders even assure the man they are ready to forgive and are earnestly desirous of his restoration. With that goal in view, they exercise Christian discipline and labor for repentance. Following the teaching of the Church Order, they pursue reconciliation “in the way of repentance” (Art. 78) and will restore the sinner only “upon sufficient evidence of repentance” (Art. 75). The elders will meet with the man, instruct him, admonish him, apply Scripture to him, pray with him, and look him squarely in the eyes saying, “You *must* repent.” If there is no repentance, then at the appointed time in the course of ecclesiastical discipline, they will inform the congregation of the man’s name so that the congregation can confront the man and say, “Your sin is a great offense to

God and us, *repent!*” In their private meetings the elders will pray to God, and admonish the congregation to pray, peradventure God will give the man repentance to the acknowledging of the truth (II Tim. 2:25).

If the consistory takes the alternative approach of “forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration, then repentance as the fruit,” they will forgive, reconcile and restore the man whether he repents or not. They will not only assure him that they are ready to receive him should he repent, but they will actually say to him apart from any evidence of repentance, “We forgive you.” Even though Jesus teaches, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and *if he repent, forgive him,*” (Luke 17:3), they forgive and restore him. Even though the Church Order teaches reconciliation *in the way of repentance*, they forgive and restore him. Even though this particular fellow has proven himself to be a manipulative deceiver who is eager to play games with the consistory, they forgive and restore him. Even though this lawless rebel is a grave threat to the wellbeing of the entire congregation, the consistory informs the congregation that they have forgiven him and that the congregation must do likewise, restoring the man into full fellowship. Even though the elders are called to watch for the souls of men, they do the most destructive thing they could possibly do to an as yet rotten, incorrigible sinner and they forgive him with a meaningless forgive-

ness, and implicitly assure him by their forgiveness and reconciliation that his sin is not offensive and creates no breach. The consistory declares, “We forgive you all your terrible sins and restore you,” so that the man experiences full fellowship in the body of the congregation. The hope of the consistory is that their graciousness in reconciliation and restoration will make the man grateful so that he repents.

If that backwards theology of man takes root in the church, it will work itself through and lawlessness will reign. From the pulpit, the minister can issue calls to repentance day and night, but they are empty. The erroneous theology empties them. Lawlessness will reign.

The Church Order knows of one approach for the consistory: Reconciliation *in the way of repentance*. The theology behind this approach is the theology of Scripture defended by the synods.

Take it to heart

The doctrine of repentance is now on paper. But what does it matter, reader, if *you* do not repent and if *I* do not repent?

There is a way for reconciliation among God’s children and peace in God’s church. It is God’s way of repentance.

May God take what is on paper and put it in our hearts, causing us to prosper “in the way of repentance.”

Letters

Baptists and baptism of infants

Dear [editor],

I refer to the *Standard Bearer* of February 1, 2022.

Steven Key, in his mediation, is in error in stating that Baptists only baptize adult believers. We (I attend a Gospel Standard Strict and Particular Baptist chapel here in the UK) baptize believers of any age (though not infants, as they are unable to believe)—some aged 9 and early teenagers who have experienced salvation through the atoning work of Christ at Calvary. So not only adults, as Steven states. Perhaps he should check before rushing into print!

We have GSS&P churches in the USA, Canada, and Australia.

Best regards and may you continue to experience the Lord’s blessing in your editorial work and beyond.

Lance Y. Morley
Great Britain

Rev. Key’s response:

Dear Mr. Morley,

I stand corrected. However, there is something far more serious than my inaccuracy. By your own admission, your view of baptism depends on having “experienced salvation through the atoning work of Christ.” So you might baptize some as young as 9 years of age, but you deny infants the sacrament of baptism “as they are unable to believe.” That is a direct contradiction of the teaching of the text, and indeed of the place the Bible gives infants in the covenant of grace. Little children, even infants in Christ’s church, have a wonderful place, being loved by God Himself and being forgiven because of their union with Christ. “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14).

In Christ’s love,
Pastor Steven Key



Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Chalcedon (451): The creed

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2022, p. 178.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council's abiding legacy was the formulation of the Creed of Chalcedon. We will briefly examine that Creed. Perhaps you would like to read it first; it is readily accessible in print and electronic form.¹

Reaffirming the faith of the church of the past

This creed reaffirms what the church had confessed in the past. It opens by noting that it is “following the holy fathers,” and it ends “as...the Creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.” The delegates to Chalcedon did not turn from past teachings, but developed them. This Creed represents the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the church into a deeper understanding of truth.

Reformed believers appreciate this point. The early church's confession regarding the Trinity, and the person and work of Christ, becomes our own. We make the Creed our own; and Article 19 of the Belgic Confession sets forth the same truths.

Expressing the relation between Christ's natures and person

Two questions set forth the main doctrinal issues: How can Christ be truly man and truly God? And, how are His divine and human natures related to each other? The Creed answered these questions.

How would you answer these questions in your own words? What human language can fully convey the mystery of God in the flesh? How can mere humans comprehend fully that Christ became a real man, but remained fully God?

The fathers of Chalcedon used four terms to express this relation: “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” Note that each of the four terms is negative. It is easier to say what is *not* true of the relation of the two natures

in the person of the Son of God than to state that relation positively.

The two natures are united “without confusion” and “without change.” This means that each nature retained its own characteristics. The divine nature retained all the characteristics of a divine nature; Christ was eternal and all-powerful, for example. And the human nature kept all the characteristics of a human nature; Christ's body was limited, weak, and subject to bearing the curse of God's wrath, for example. So the two natures were not “changed”; they remained divine and human. Nor were they “confused,” that is, combined or mixed with each other. They are united in such a way that they remain distinct. Christ is not a God-man, part God and part man; He is fully God and fully human.

That the two natures are united “without division” and “without separation” means that they are so really united in the one person of the Son of God, that they will never be separated from each other. From the moment Christ was conceived, He was God in the flesh, possessing two natures. He remained such through His time on earth, His death, and His resurrection, and He will remain so to all eternity.

Our Belgic Confession reminds us that at Christ's death a great change occurred in His human nature: His body and soul were separated from each other. Even then, His divine nature remained united to both His body and His soul. Another great change occurred in His human nature when He arose: His body and soul were reunited, and made heavenly and glorious. But His divine nature always was united to His human.

Opposing past and current heresies

In addition to answering this main question, the Creed opposes every significant heresy regarding the Trinity and the person and natures of Christ that was taught up until 451. Arius had taught that Christ was a creature, but was created before the world was created. The Creed emphasizes that Christ is of the same essence as the Father, begotten of the Father from eternity.

¹ Most books containing the ecumenical creeds include it. It can also be found at <http://www.prc.org/about/official-standards/creeds/ecumenical/chalcedon> and in the back of the PRC Psalter.

Apollinaris taught that Christ had a human body and soul, but a divine spirit; in other words, He was not completely human. The Creed asserts that He was “truly man, of a rational soul and body.” Here the word “soul” includes the idea of “spirit.”

Nestorius had taught that Christ was a human person; in fact, that He was *two* persons—one fully God, and the other fully human. The Creed asserts that Christ was one person in whom two natures are united.

And Eutyches taught that Christ had only one nature, a divine nature, and that His humanity was taken

up into His divinity. The Creed asserts that Christ is to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion and without change.

The Creed of Chalcedon represented a distinct development in the mind of the church. The Nicene Creed (325) asserted that God was Triune, and that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were each God. It laid the foundation for a proper view of the triune God. The Chalcedonian Creed emphasized that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is fully God and fully man. It laid the foundation for a proper view of how Jesus Christ can be the Savior of God’s people, the Mediator of God’s covenant.



Believing and confessing

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Of Jesus Christ, true God and man, the only Savior of the world

(Second Helvetic Confession, 11a)

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2022, p. 156.

Christ Is True God.

We further believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world. And we believe that He was born, not only when He assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, and not only before the foundation of the world was laid, but by the Father before all eternity in an inexpressible manner. For Isaiah said: “Who can tell his generation?” (Isaiah 53:8). And Micah says: “His origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2). And John said in the Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Therefore, with respect to His divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father; true God (Phil. 2:11), not only in name or by adoption or by any merit, but in substance and nature, as the apostle John has often said: “This is the true God and eternal life” (I John 5:20). Paul also says: “He appointed the Son the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding all things by his word of power” (Heb. 1:2-3). For

in the Gospel the Lord Himself said: “Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (John 17:5). And in another place in the Gospel it is written: “The Jews sought all the more to kill him because he...called God his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

Christology—the doctrine concerning Christ. This is the subject treated in the eleventh chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession. It is one of the lengthier chapters in the creed. Bullinger extends his treatment of the truth concerning Christ to eighteen paragraphs. Several of the paragraphs are quite extensive. Of the eighteen paragraphs, five are entitled “The Sects.” Once again, the SHC shows itself to be distinctively Reformed. Not only does it set forth the truth of Christ positively but also negatively. Bullinger is not satisfied to explain what the teaching of Scripture is; he also identifies the errors that attack biblical teaching. He is polemical, as the Reformed faith always is.

There are three pillars of Reformed Christology. The first pillar is that Jesus Christ is true God. The second

that Jesus Christ is also really and fully a man. And the third is that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. Each of these truths is explained and defended in this chapter of the SHC. In fact, they are all incorporated into the title of the chapter: “Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World.”

The first pillar of Reformed Christology is the truth treated in the first paragraph: Jesus Christ is true God. As Bullinger demonstrates, this is the teaching of Scripture by way of prophecy in the Old Testament, as for example, in the well-known prophecies of Isaiah 53:8 and Micah 5:2. The Messianic hope of the Old Testament people of God was the hope of the coming of the great Son of David who was also David’s Lord.

The teaching of the Old Testament is corroborated by the gospel accounts, which relate the birth, life, and death of our Lord. Bullinger quotes John 1:1, where the Bible teaches that the Word (capitalized because it refers to Jesus Christ) is in the beginning, with God—always and eternally with God—and is God. This is one of the clearest passages in the gospel accounts teaching the deity of Christ. Bullinger also refers to Jesus’ self-testimony, His identification of Himself as essentially one with God. He quotes John 5:18, where the wicked Jews sought to kill Jesus because He made Himself equal with God. And he also quotes Jesus’ word in His High Priestly Prayer as found in John 17:5, which in the King James Version is: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

The teaching of the Old Testament and the gospel accounts is confirmed by the New Testament epistles, which teach that “with respect of His divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father.” Jesus is not only the Son of God “in name or by adoption or by any merit,” but He is God’s Son “in substance and nature.” Bullinger cites Philippians 2:11, where the apostle teaches that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord in the sense of “the Lord God,” Lord in the fullest and most absolute sense of the word. He also appeals to I John 5:20, where the apostle says about God’s Son Jesus Christ, “This is the true God, and eternal life.” And he points to Hebrews 1:2-3. In this passage, the apostle teaches that God has appointed Jesus Christ the heir of all things; that God created all things by Jesus Christ, which implies that He Himself is not created; that Christ is “the brightness of his [God’s] glory, and the express image of his person” so that Christ, says Bullinger, “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His na-

ture;” and that God upholds all things by the word of Christ’s power.

Any honest reading of Scripture can lead to only one conclusion: the Bible teaches that Jesus is true God. He is one with God and shares in the very being of God. Unquestionably, Scripture teaches the deity of Jesus Christ. You may disagree with that teaching. You may contradict and oppose that teaching. You may consider that teaching impossible and ludicrous. You may despise that teaching and those who confess it. But you cannot in all honesty deny that this is clearly the teaching of Scripture.

Two truths that are closely connected to the truth of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ are included in the first paragraph of chapter 11 of the SHC. First, the confession introduces its defense of Christ’s deity by teaching that Christ “was predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world.” Jesus Christ is God’s elect. God’s people are elect, but God’s people are elected in Jesus Christ and are given by God to Jesus Christ and Christ as their head to them. The biblical truth of election must begin with the election of Christ. This is how the prophet Isaiah refers to Christ prophetically in Isaiah 42:1, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.” In Matthew 12:17-21, Matthew under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit applies Isaiah’s prophecy to the Lord Jesus.

Frequently, the New Testament Scriptures teach that God’s people are chosen by God in Jesus Christ. One such passage is Ephesians 1:3-6. In verse 3, the apostle blesses God because He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings “in Christ.” In verse 4, he teaches that God has chosen us “in him,” that is, in Christ before the foundation of the world. In verse 5, he teaches that God has predestinated us unto the adoption of children “by Jesus Christ.” And in verse 6, he concludes the section by proclaiming that God in His grace “hath made us accepted in the beloved.” “The beloved” is the beloved Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second truth that is closely related to the Bible’s teaching of the deity of Christ is His eternal generation. This is the teaching of the SHC when it says, “And we believe that He was born, not only when He assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, and not only before the foundation of the world was laid, but by the Father before all eternity in an inexpressible manner.” Christ is the only begotten Son of God. As the second person of the Trinity, within the being of God, He is eternally begotten. The SHC, along with the other great Reformation creeds, embraces the Christology of the ancient ecumen-

ical creeds. The Nicene Creed: “I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds...begotten, not made, being of one essence with the Father.” The Athanasian Creed: “For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man. God, of the essence of the Father, begotten before the worlds.”

The Sects.

We therefore abhor the impious doctrine of Arius and the Arians against the Son of God, and especially the blasphemies of the Spaniard, Michael Servetus, and all his followers, which Satan through them has, as it were, dragged up out of hell and has most audaciously and impiously spread abroad in the world.

In this brief paragraph, the SHC identifies two heretics and their heresies that deny the fundamental truth of the gospel that Jesus Christ is truly God. It mentions these two false teachers by name: Arius and Michael Servetus. Although these men are heretics, whose denial of Christ's deity was condemned by the church of their day, the title given to this paragraph (which is used prior to this and which will be used several times throughout this and future chapters of the SHC) gives a unique viewpoint of heretics and their heresies: they are sectarian. They are not “sects” in the same way in which we speak of the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses as “sects.” But they are “sects” because they cause division in the church. They disrupt the unity of the church by introducing a party spirit within the church, setting member against member and group against group. This is invariably the evil result of heresy—strife and division. This is often part of the evil spirit that grips heretics: their lust for power, for the adoration of devoted followers, men and women who follow them unquestioningly.

The first heretic condemned in this paragraph of the SHC is Arius (256-336): “We therefore abhor the impious doctrine of Arius and the Arians.” Take note of the strong language; the true church *abhors* the doctrine of Arius and the Arians. Bullinger's approach is not like so many theologians today who express mild disagreement with heretics, while at the same time finding much that they have in common in the interests of promoting ecumenical dialogue. The faithful Reformed church *abhors* the heretics and their heresies. Further, Bullinger describes Arius' false teaching as an “impious doctrine.” Heresy is always “impious” because doctrine affects life. What we believe invariably works itself out

in how we live. The denial that Jesus is truly God has the effect that it denies that Jesus' teaching, His doctrine and commandments, are the very word of the Son of God. That denial leads to impiety of every sort.

Arius was a presbyter of the church in Constantinople. He emphasized God the Father's uniqueness and Christ's subordination to the Father. Christ was not the same (Greek term, *homoousios*) as the Father, but rather was like or similar to (Greek term, *homoiousios*) the Father. Arius argued that if the Son is begotten, there was a time before He was begotten; He had a beginning of His existence.

Arius was opposed by the champion of orthodoxy, Athanasius (ca. 293-373). He condemned Arius' teaching and over against Arius taught that Jesus Christ is consubstantial and coeternal with God the Father. While it is true that in human begetting there is a time before a child is begotten when he does not exist, Christ's begetting is an eternal begetting. Eternally He is begotten and eternally God is His Father. The Arian controversy was settled at the Council of Nicea in AD 325. At the Council, Athanasius' condemnation of Arius was upheld and the creed drafted by the Council maintained the biblical truth that Christ is truly God.

Michael Servetus (ca. 1509-1553) is the other heretic who is mentioned in this paragraph. While Arius was a heretic in the early history of the Christian church, Servetus is from a much later time, the Reformation era. Bullinger says that by the blasphemies of Servetus and his followers, Satan “dragged up out of hell and has most audaciously and impiously spread abroad” heresy in the world. Satan's use of the heretic and heresy in his warfare against the church is identified. The heretic is the servant of Satan. Scripture makes the same connection between Satan and the heretic. In I Timothy 1:20, the apostle refers to the heretics Hymenaeus and Alexander “whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.” In Revelation 3:9, the inspired apostle speaks of the wicked Jews as belonging to “the synagogue of Satan.”

Servetus was a Spanish physician who dabbled in theology. The study of theology was a kind of hobby for Servetus, who thought more of his theological abilities than he ought to have. He published a book entitled *The Restoration of Christianity*, in which he condemned the Nicene Creed's defense of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. He also denied predestination, a doctrine which he found especially revolting, and infant baptism.

In 1553 Servetus was discovered hiding out in Geneva and was promptly arrested. It is surprising that he had taken refuge in Geneva, the home of his bitterest en-

emy, John Calvin. Either he was extremely naïve or unimaginably bold. Whatever the case, he was identified, arrested, and imprisoned. It should not be overlooked that Servetus was at this time a wanted man throughout Europe. Not only in Protestant cities, but also in Roman Catholic cities, Servetus had a price on his head. And, as in Geneva, Servetus would have been executed

by whomever captured him. That is what happened. While in prison, Calvin visited with Servetus, showing love to his enemy. He pleaded with him to recant his errors. But Servetus refused. The result was that after a public trial, Servetus was condemned as a heretic and sentenced to death. On October 27, 1553, that sentence was carried out and he was burned at the stake.



When thou sittest in thine house

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A child's confession of his Lord

**“Make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers.”
—Ezra 10:11**

Public confession of your faith must take place between your baptism and your approach to the holy supper. That confession is a unique and important event because it represents the time when you rise in the assembly of believers and publicly assert that you desire to be one of them. It is also true that in that sense public confession is entirely necessary and perfectly appropriate. It is an event in your life, and is an important one. But that event should by no means suggest that it is your first confession, or that it is to be your last.

Have you ever heard the expressions: “I shall make my confession next year” or “I made my confession three years ago”? Such statements ought not to be made. They betray an improper attitude, for they suggest that public confession is a milestone which, once it has been passed, can conveniently be forgotten. They are expressions which seem to imply that the young man or woman who has not yet committed himself to the event of public confession cannot yet be held responsible for the moral implications involved in that event. And they suggest also that he who has “made his confession” is thereby absolved of all responsibility in the matter.

That attitude is quite wrong. Confession is a lifelong matter. Responsibility for it begins early and never ceases. One's confession should be actively expressed each time one observes that Satan's voice and strength and machinations are being employed against the Savior.

Indeed, confession begins early. It comes to expression in the schoolboy who hears his Jesus insulted by one of his associates. He objects to that insult. He

simply refuses to be told such things. His fellows tease him, of course, and mock him, but, even though he is buffeted and beaten, he perseveres in his confession. Such occasions are presented to children—in school, on the streets, at their games—and they should rise to them. Baptized children must be Jesus' children, and must be indignant when any disparage the Savior they love. Confession begins as early as that; and those early confessions sometimes cost more of sacrifice and of tears than does the public confession in the church.

Unfortunately, there are also indifferent children. There are children who are incapable of a righteous indignation. And there is also that other, most unbearable type, those, namely, who always want to be teaching others, and that frequently by means of “big” words they themselves do not comprehend. Such practices represent no true confession, naturally, but only arrogance and pride. If these young Pharisees could, they would parade through the streets wearing their minister's wing collar and white necktie. We are not rising to the defense of these.

But the truth remains that a young child should be filled with childlike zeal for Jesus; he should bow before Jesus' name; he should foster reverence and respect in his heart for his Savior. Knowing that he belongs to Jesus, he may not be passive and indifferent when he hears his fellows reproach his Master. A good child allows no one to say anything disparaging about his own father or mother. And every child can and must know that Jesus said: “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37). Vaunted pedantry becomes no child, but love and ardor and zeal for Immanuel do. He must rise to defend the honor of his Jesus, and he must do it with an unwavering voice,

with a flush of indignation on his cheeks, and with a sparkle in his eye. That is the true and natural way in which a baptized child confesses his Lord.

Fathers and mothers must augment that kind of confession in their children. None can be as loyal as a child, none as heroic, none as susceptible to indignation. Unfortunately, all parents do not observe that, and do not assist their children in a constant confessing. Father, well, he once “made his confession.” And mother “attends communion,” of course, and for the rest, she seems to take Jesus for granted.

If that be your attitude, parents, how will your child ever learn to confess? You know he must be encouraged to persist in making his confession constant. You know how hard it is for him to do that. Nothing “hurts” a child quite as much as to be laughed at by his fellows. There is quick justice in the world of children. They make their verdicts, pass sentences, and enforce them. Sometimes they enforce them by teasing, sometimes by vexing, and sometimes by coming directly “to blows.”

Your child needs encouragement. Stop to appreciate his situation. He leaves home to make contact with the world, and does so with the sure conviction that Jesus is supreme always and everywhere. Then he learns it is just because of that conviction that he is to be called into court by his fellows. That awareness shocks him, fills him with fear and temerity. If in that crisis you fail to sustain him by your love and your prayers, it is most likely that when he next hears his Jesus insulted, he will be less courageous in rallying to the defense. Later he will say nothing, and finally he will join with his comrades in laughing at some other boy.

Hence parents and teachers have a weighty responsibility in this matter. It would, in fact, be quite appropriate if catechism classes and sermons were made more emphatically encouraging to young confessors. Do not forget that courage is a singular quality. Once it has gone, it seldom returns. Yet it is a noble quality of the soul, and without it there can be no true confession.

Here is a young man who has become twenty years of age. He has never risen to defend his Lord, has never by his actions testified for Him, has never sacrificed for Jesus. Now, having almost attained the legal age of maturity, he is accepted by his pastor, and he says “Yes” before the congregation. He has “made his confession.” But who would dare to call that a confession which obviously was a mere formal observance of a custom! No heroic courage entered into it—unless it were the courage to defy the embarrassment of rising before so large a group of people. And of genuine ardor, of heartfelt zeal, there was nothing at all.

Indeed, no one ever truly confessed whose experi-

ence as a child and as a youth was not characterized by frequent confessions of his Lord. He must have been previously mocked, despised, blasphemed, beaten, perhaps. He must have persevered courageously in spite of these, being motivated solely by his love for and his loyalty to Jesus. His public confession then represents a public expression of what he has long fostered in his heart. This is the true confession of every young man and of every young woman. For a young woman, too—although manifesting it less drastically than a young man—should be full of courage, of loyalty, and of love, and should never allow herself to deny her Jesus.

It is to be regretted that many parents do not fully appreciate the fact that their children should be constantly confessing their Savior. Such parents have their children baptized and accepted by the church. They send them to school, to catechism classes, and to church. But they fail to appreciate that their children should be educated to become heroes and heroines of Jesus, and that their confession, unless they become that, will be merely formal and illusory. These parents fail to respond to Ezra’s dictum to Israel: “Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land” (Ezra 10:11).

Parents who fail to respond to that plea do not appreciate the fact that the service of the Lord involves a holy warfare, and that new recruits must constantly be trained and qualified for that conflict. Yet that is the situation. After paradise God put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. That combat continues from one generation to another. One generation passes away and another rises in its place, but the holy war for the Son of God against His enemy must be fought from epoch to epoch.

For that reason, parents, the fact that you yourselves, as loyal servants, are fighting in that conflict does not suffice. You must also prepare your children for combat, must fit them out in suitable armor, must drill them, and above all, you must inspire in them an unwavering loyalty to the Lord’s banner and an unquenchable ardor for His holy name.

You say your child does not oppose the kingdom. But that is not enough. True confessing demands a positive attitude. He accompanies you in battle, does he? But he must take the initiative. The fact that he imitates your words and actions does not prove his personal valor. Remember that even a child, though he be but one in a world of others, must be the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

How foolish it is, then, to say to yourself: “I think my child will make his confession when he reaches ma-

turity.” Confession is a daily matter. It should come to expression as frequently as your child meets other children and other people. He confesses or he fails to do so as often as he is among “the people of the land.” We know that these people shrug their shoulders when Jesus’ name is mentioned.

The name of the Lord must be praised from generation to generation. The Lord’s praises must be voiced

by the seed of the church, must be sung by the children who have been baptized in His name. Hence you may not permit your child to grow accustomed to indifference or to passiveness, but must teach him to sing his Savior’s praise and to rise to his Lord’s defense at every occasion. He must be always confessing if ever his public confession is to be genuine and true. That only makes confession a sincere and heartfelt matter.



Go ye into all the world

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The covenant of God and our mission to the world (6) The missionary in the world

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2021, p. 114.

In my last article, I began to examine the truth of the covenant as it relates to our mission mandate and our antithetical calling in the world. Our antithetical calling must not become a separatist mentality. We may not hunker down inside our covenant community, consolidate our resources, enjoy our riches, and wait it out until the Lord comes. In addition, we must not be too quick to elevate our own needs as churches above the needs of the elect who are still lost in the world. We must have a covenantal culture for missions, a growing zeal for evangelism, not only on foreign fields but also in our own backyards. Then, it seems to me, we may expect to see more men who are eager to go into the world, locally and internationally, to declare among the heathen that the Lord reigns.

We now focus for a time on those missionaries who go out from the covenant community into the world to “preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:15). Yet, much will apply to local pastors as well.

The missionary is a man of the covenant. He has been brought by divine grace into an intimate relationship of fellowship and friendship with God through Jesus Christ. Baptized in the name of the triune God. Admitted into the Christian church. Distinguished from the “strangers from the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12). He grew in his faith, grew closer to God, and lived for some time in covenant with Him...for a missionary is not a novice. For years, he heard God talk to him through the preaching of the Word, par-

took of holy communion, and received the assurance that Christ loved him and died for him. For years, he learned to walk with God in joyful thankfulness, daily prayer, ongoing conversion, and weekly worship on the Sabbath day. He came to love the life of the covenant in the household of God with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

But now God through the call of the church has sent him outside the covenant community into the world of darkness. He must now *live* as a man of the covenant in antithesis to the darkness where he finds himself. He must also *preach* as a man of the covenant in antithesis to the lies of the world.

First, regarding his life, living as a man of the covenant does not mean he must maintain all the customs of his own church culture on the mission field. Rather, he must adapt himself somewhat to the customs of the native people, like the great apostle who said, “I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews.... To them that are without law [Gentiles], as without law...that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Cor. 9:19-22). The great desire of the missionary is to gain into the covenant those whom God has ordained to eternal life for the praise of the glory of His grace. Believing that God became man to save *him* into the covenant, the missionary is willing to become like the people of the culture he enters to

gain *them* into the covenant. Believing that Christ left behind His life in heaven and gave up His life on earth to save *him*, the missionary is willing to deny himself the comfortable life he once enjoyed and to lose that life for however long a time to gain *others* to Christ. He adapts. He does not compromise with evil. But he contextualizes. He places himself into the context of the people and adapts himself to their way of life for the sake of the gospel. He lets go of customs that might hinder or spoil the work of the Lord. He does not rigidly cling to all of his own customs with regard to eating and drinking, clothing and shopping, time and money, language and music, accomplishing goals and maintaining relationships, and more. When we lived in the Philippines, we needed to remind ourselves often that our American cultural ways were not necessarily better than their Filipino cultural ways. *Different* does not always mean *better*.

But living as a man of the covenant means the missionary lives the Christian life in an exemplary way, as all ministers must (I Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9). On the one hand, it is crucial that he keep himself unspotted from the world. The missionary goes into the world! He should expect to encounter spiritual darkness because the world is the realm of Satan where evil reigns, idols stand tall, debauchery prevails, and lies run wild and free. But he must not become one with the heathen in their sins. He must not stroll into the pagan temple or down a dark alley in the city to join himself to a harlot. He must not drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils, or partake of the Lord's table and the table of devils. He must not feast gluttonously before the poor or drink excessively with the fools or dance to the beat of worldly music. He must not join them at their gambling tables or otherwise show himself to be a lover of money. He must not swear in his anger or react to opposition or criticism with rage. He must not strut about as if he is someone important, looking down his nose at others. Such are the behaviors of the ungodly among whom he labors. Such must not be his behavior. O, what damage is done to Christianity and the honor of God by the missionary who is supposed to represent the glorious covenant of God but who acts like the heathen and joins in the darkness!

On the contrary, he must live as a man of God who shines in the midst of the darkness. Such is a man who knows the God of the covenant personally and intimately as One who loves him and dwells with him. He is a man who has tasted the goodness of the Lord and found it sweet beyond all else, who testifies that the lovingkindness of God is better than life, than all the glittering pleasures that intoxicate the men of the world. He is a man whose heart

is truly with God, who truly enjoys fellowship with God by faith from day to day. A man of fervent, thankful, and intimate prayer. A man who knows the forgiveness of his sins by his gracious and merciful Father in heaven through Christ. A man who forgives others, strives against his indwelling sins, flees from temptation, runs with patience the race set before him, looks to Jesus the Author and Finisher of his faith. In his love for the God of the covenant, he is willing to sacrifice the comforts of home and friends. He is able to live joyfully and contentedly in an unfamiliar place with earthly challenges like a harsher climate, a less developed infrastructure, cultural distance, heavy traffic, and even persecution. For he walks near to the Lord his God and drinks deeply from His fountain of grace day by day in the communion of prayer and songs of thanksgiving. Daily he contemplates the cross of Jesus, which stands ever before his eyes as the most amazing and astonishing reality he has ever seen, and which takes his breath away time and time again. That amazing cross guards his soul from fastening on the illusions of happiness and pleasure that are the empty things of the world.

But furthermore, the missionary of the covenant must also preach the gospel of the covenant, a message that is antithetical to the lies of the world. He must preach the message that Jehovah alone is God, the personal Creator of the universe, who dwells eternally in covenant within Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, and there is no other god beside Him. That message is distinct and bold in a world that worships a pantheon of gods and detests the exclusivism of Christianity. He must preach the unpopular message that we are all corrupt sinners in Adam, conceived and born totally depraved by nature. Then he must also preach the gospel that there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus, the promised Messiah, Son of God, and Mediator of the covenant, who through His crucifixion and resurrection has made a way for sinners to inherit eternal life. That message is also scandalous to the world that seeks salvation in other names, that scoffs at the cross, or prays to spirits. He must preach the message that God establishes an everlasting covenant of intimate fellowship and friendship with all whom He predestined to eternal life. That message of unconditional election will also incite opposition and stand out as distinct in a world that praises the free will and equal opportunity of every man. The message must emphasize that God does not establish His covenant with sinners on the condition that they do something first, but God brings sinners into His covenant by sovereign grace and gives them faith whereby they experience a small foretaste of fellowship with God in this life.

The missionary must also preach the call of the gos-

pel, which is likewise antithetical in nature. In a world that rushes headlong toward the damnation of hell, the missionary must utter from the housetops, “Repent! Turn from your idols to the living God.” He must preach the warning of the gospel that those who walk in darkness and reject the gospel will be damned. He must preach the promise of the gospel that those who come to the Light and believe the gospel will be saved. Although the promise of the covenant is particular, the proclamation of that promise must be general. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” the missionary must cry out, “and thou shalt be saved into the everlasting covenant, in which God will be your God and dwell with you forever.”

Finally, the missionary must teach believers all the

antithetical commands of Christ. “Follow Christ,” he must say, “by keeping all His commandments in gratitude for what He has done for you.” When the missionary himself is practicing what he preaches, living an antithetical and thankful life on the mission field, his exhortations will carry more weight and be more effective. He must call converts to live the life of the covenant, the life of thankfulness to their God who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. He must patiently disciple them and call them to be transformed from their former conduct to the Christian life by the renewing of their minds.

May God prepare many such men as shining heralds of His covenant in the world.



Strength of youth

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

Personal devotions as communion with God

“How are you doing with your personal devotions?” This might be a question your parents ask you periodically or something the elders of your church bring up at family visitation. This inquiry often smites the young soul with feelings of guilt, for the conscience testifies within, “I know I should be more faithful in reading my Bible and in heartfelt prayer.” And it is true that you and I must improve in our devotions. We should make it more of a priority. We ought to stop making excuses—they are all bad. The practice of personal devotions *is* an obligation.

However, devotions are far more than something you *must* do. Devotions are a delight. In your personal devotions you enjoy fellowship with God. Coming apart with God for a little while, you hear Him, your God, speak to you in His Word. There in His presence, you respond to Him in prayer, pouring out your heart before Him. In devotions, conversation takes place as Friend-Lord breathes secrets to His friend-servant, and friend-servant breathes back adoration, confession, thanks, and supplicating pleas. Back and forth, there is a holy dialogue between you and the triune God during devotions. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3b). Having per-

sonal devotions is to enjoy sweet communion with your God.

This communion is not only a delight to the soul but a blessing of salvation. Let me put it more strongly: the communion with God that we enjoy in personal devotions *is* our salvation. No, communion with God in devotions is *not* what we do in order to gain salvation with God, but rather it *is* what salvation consists of. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Only with this perspective will we recognize personal devotions as a privilege rather than a burden.

The beautiful doctrine of God’s covenant helps us understand this perspective on personal devotions. Remember that God’s covenant is a relationship of friendship and fellowship. To be saved is to be brought into covenant with God. God rescues us who are by nature haters of God (and of His communion), children of Satan, and deserving of His infinite wrath. But this deliverance is not only *from* spiritual darkness. It is salvation *unto* His covenant—unto friendship and fellowship with our God. To be saved is to be given fellowship with God that we enjoy in devotions.

Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself in order that we might have this communion. He is called the Mediator of the covenant—the go-between. We as a sinful people do not only despise communion with God, but we do not even have the right to approach the holy God. So this Mediator Jesus Christ came to this earth to gain for us access to the Father. He suffered and died so that we might have this right to fellowship with the holy God. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Having earned for us access into God’s presence, Jesus Christ the Mediator was not finished with His work. He rose from the dead and ascended so that He might continue His work. He joins us to Himself by the living bond of faith. He draws near to us by His Spirit, and draws us near to God by that same Spirit. By His Word and Spirit, He speaks to us what God would have us hear, and He causes us to respond in prayer. Christ’s saving work, you see, is to draw God near to us and draw us near to Him. Christ has given Himself for us exactly so that we might enjoy sweet communion with God in our personal devotions. How valuable is this saving grace to you?

This fellowship with God we first enjoy during formal worship with God’s church. During worship services there is a holy conversation between God and His people. Christ by His Spirit draws near to His bride to commune with her whom He has saved unto Himself. Members of this body should not see it as a burden to frequent the house of God for worship. This too is a delightful blessing of salvation and not only an obligation. The child of God exclaims about worship, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even

fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Ps. 84:1-2).

Having enjoyed communion with God in worship, God’s people do not respond, “I have had enough of this blessing of salvation for the week.” Having tasted and seen the goodness of their God, they crave more. Thus, during the week, fathers lead families in devotions, teachers lead students in devotions, and societies gather to study God’s Word and pray together. And as a son or daughter with a personal relationship to Father, each child comes to God regularly in private, personal devotions also. That soul joyously sings these words:

My Savior, 'neath Thy shelt'ring wings
My soul delights to dwell;
Still closer to Thy side I press, For near Thee all is well.
My soul shall conquer every foe, Upholden by Thy hand;
Thy people shall rejoice in God,
Thy saints in glory stand. (Psalter #163, stanza 3)

Closer we press until that thrilling day when the upright in rapture shall commune with Him face to face. This is salvation. It is not how you get salvation. It *is* salvation. Christ grants you access. Jehovah your God draws you His friend into His communion. Why would we not want to engage in the blessing of personal devotions?

Such is the folly of our sinful natures. That which is a blessing we view as a burden. That which is a delight we despise. That which is part of our salvation we imagine we can be without.

And this is the mercy of our God: He forgives us for despising His grace, and draws us with cords of love in Jesus Christ back to Himself again. His Spirit causes us to discipline ourselves in the good habit of personal devotions. And we discover more and more according to that new heart God has given that communion with Him is indeed sweet.



Pertaining to the churches in common— PR Theological Seminary

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, rector and professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI

News from the seminary

The church has always provided for the training of those who are called to proclaim the Word of the Lord. In the Old Testament, God did not only reveal His Word directly to the prophets. But experienced prophets trained Israel’s future prophets to function as

the mouthpieces of God. During the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, there are several references in Scripture to the schools for the “sons of the prophets.” Specific reference is made to schools that existed at Bethel (II Kings 2:3), at Jericho (II Kings 2:5), and at Gilgal

(II Kings 4:38). For some three years, Jesus trained His twelve disciples. Even after His resurrection and prior to His ascension, Jesus appeared to the disciples in order to teach them “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

In the early New Testament church, the apostle Paul trained Timothy, Titus, and Luke. Our “Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology” states that with the founding of the church among the nations, “the necessity was soon felt of training youths and men for the holy ministry under the ordinary dispensation of the Spirit by the regular methods of instruction.” Accordingly, Paul in II Timothy 2:2 commissioned that “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” The same “Form” goes on to say that early in the history of the church “this training was...done by learned and capable overseers of the church.” A bit later, “the schools of Alexandria, Antioch, and other important cities were especially engaged in this work.”

The Reformers insisted on a trained ministry and were themselves involved in the training of men for the gospel ministry. Martin Luther’s name is invariably connected to the University of Wittenberg; John Calvin’s name with the Academy of Geneva. The Dutch Reformed continued the practice of training ministerial candidates in the theological faculties of the prominent Reformed universities. These universities were connected to the main Reformed denominations. In the history of the Dutch Reformed in the United States, including the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, denominations established and maintained their own seminaries. The demands of the work require professors who, though experienced pastors, dedicate themselves full time to the task of instruction.

The Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary was founded by and is maintained by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA). The seminary is an ecclesiastical institution. It is church owned, church operated, church supervised, and church loved. That is as it should be. The purpose of the seminary is chiefly the training of men for the gospel ministry in the PRCA, our sister churches, and other churches with whom we maintain cordial relationships. The faculty, staff, and students are under the supervision of the synod of the PRCA and the synodically appointed Theological School Committee (TSC). The TSC, made up ordinarily of five ministers and five elders, typically meets every month in order to transact the business of the seminary. Each month a committee of two visits classes and reports to the TSC on the professors’ instruction, as well as on the

progress of the students. The faculty appreciates these visits, which are always an encouragement to them and to the students.

The seminary faculty

The faculty is presently undergoing the most significant, wholesale turnover in the history of the seminary. All three of the current professors are in the process of being replaced. As most of you know, the synodical policy requires that when a professor reaches the age of 65, his replacement be called. Once the replacement has accepted the synodical appointment, a five-year transition period begins. In the early part of the transition, the newly appointed professor secures his advanced degree. In the second half of the transition, he gradually prepares to teach and begins to teach the courses assigned to him.

Prof. Russell Dykstra is finishing the five-year transition to Prof. Douglas Kuiper. His duties at the seminary will be finished after more than twenty-five years of dedicated service to our churches. Next year Prof. Kuiper will be taking over completely Prof. Dykstra’s courses in the area of Church History and New Testament studies. At the same time, Prof. Dykstra is laboring full time as the pastor of the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. He is the first professor in the history of our churches to retire from the seminary and accept a charge in a local congregation. By all accounts, he is very capably juggling the responsibilities of both positions. We are very thankful as his colleagues and as churches for his devotion to the cause of the theological education of our ministers over two-and-a-half decades.

Prof. Ronald Cammenga is in the midst of the five-year transition to Prof. Brian Huizinga. Our supporters may recall that Prof. Huizinga was granted an additional year in the transition process so that, besides obtaining his advanced degree, he might also devote extra time to gaining competency in theological Dutch. So much of our heritage as churches, especially our broader heritage in the Dutch-Reformed tradition, is in the Dutch language. And so much that is in Dutch has not yet been translated. Prof. Huizinga will be gradually taking over courses in the area of Reformed Dogmatics (systematic theology) and Old Testament studies. This year he has actually begun to teach, taking one course in each of the seminary’s two semesters.

Prof. Cory Griess was called by Synod 2021 to be the replacement for Prof. Barrett Gritters. He and his family are settled into their new home, which for the first time in their experience is not a parsonage. Over the next five years Prof. Griess will gradually replace Prof. Gritters in the area of Practical Theology and

New Testament studies. Prof. Griess is currently doing the course work necessary for securing his ThM degree from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. Until he secures his degree, Prof. Gritters will continue to teach full time.

Besides preparing for their courses and teaching them, the seminary faculty are occupied in many different aspects of the life of the churches. We all preach in the churches regularly, assist local congregations in teaching their catechism classes, lead Bible study societies, serve on denominational committees, assist consistories in pastoral counseling, give speeches, and write in the *Standard Bearer*, *Beacon Lights*, and *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Last fall the seminary sponsored a conference on preaching. The conference theme was “The Lord Gave the Word.” You can listen to the speeches that were given on the seminary’s website. They are slated to be published in the April 2022 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*.

Our student body

Our student body is not large, but at present we have at least one student in each year of our four-year program. Hopefully you have met some of them, or, in the case of two of our students who are licensed “to speak a word of edification,” heard them from the pulpits of the congregation to which you belong.

We have one fourth-year student, Marcus Wee, whose wife is Tze Yan. The Wees have been blessed with three young and energetic sons: Asaph, Silas, and Thaddaeus. Marcus has recently completed an internship at Faith Protestant Reformed Church under the capable mentoring of Rev. Clayton Spronk. Many of you have heard Marcus, who is one of our students licensed to lead public worship services. In January he returned to seminary in order to complete his last semester of study. At the end of the 2021-2022 school year, Marcus anticipates examination before our synod, after which he and his family will return to their native Singapore.

Isaac Peters is one of our third-year students. Isaac is married to Rebekah. The Peters have been blessed with four children: Donnie, Charlie, Bella, and Lillian. The oldest three are currently enrolled in Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. Isaac is completing a special three-year program. At the end of this semester, he hopes to return to Australia, where he and his family are members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, with whom our Protestant Reformed Churches have a close relationship. There he hopes to join the ranks of colleagues who have also been trained in the PRC Seminary.

Matthew Koerner is our other third-year student.

He, too, has been licensed to speak a word of edification in our churches. At this point in his studies, Matt is eagerly looking forward to his upcoming six-month internship, which begins in July. His internship will be in the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin, under the mentoring of Rev. Erik Guichelaar. The internship aims to give students experience in all aspects of the work of the pastoral ministry: making regular sermons, teaching catechism classes, leading Bible study societies, attending consistory and council meetings, conducting various kinds of visits, sitting in some family visitations, attending the meetings of the broader assemblies, and many other practical aspects of the calling of an undershepherd. Over the years since its inception, the internship program has proven to be an invaluable tool in the training of our students, as it will certainly be for Matt.

Arend Haveman is our second-year student. With the second year of study, seminary students are exposed to new challenges in their training for the ministry. Now, for the first time, they are not silent attendees of the Practice Preaching sessions, but begin to make and deliver sermons before the faculty and the rest of the student body. Beginning with the second year and every semester thereafter, every student makes and preaches two sermons each semester of the school year. Texts are assigned by the professors. Outlines of student sermons are submitted the Friday before the Practice Preaching sessions, which are routinely held on Monday mornings. One professor serves as each student’s critic, evaluating both the content and delivery of the sermon. These sessions are invaluable in preparing our students to preach sermons that glorify God, magnify the cross of Christ, and edify God’s people.

Our first-year student is Aaron Van Dyke. Aaron is married to Sarah and together they are eagerly awaiting the birth of their first child. Having completed his first semester of study, Aaron is fully acclimated to the rigors of seminary work. As he continues his studies in the biblical languages, Reformed dogmatics, hermeneutics, homiletics, church history, and more, he is no doubt coming to see how all the subjects aim at producing sound gospel preachers.

Beseeching the Lord of the harvest

As thankful to God as we are for the quality men presently studying in the seminary, we cannot but be reminded of the great need that our churches continue to have for students for the ministry. All of the circumstances of the last few years have added to the shortages in our ministerial ranks. There have been retirements, disbarments, replacements appointed for

the seminary, and separation of some pastors (schism). These have aggravated the existing shortage within our denomination. More than ever, we need to beseech the Lord of the harvest for laborers.

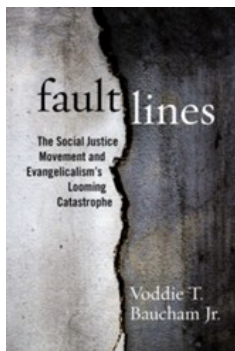
Without doubt, the Lord's ears have been open to our cries. He is working in the hearts of young men. The churches and the elders of the churches are putting the call to the ministry before capable young men. Pastors are preaching special sermons and frequently making specific applications in their sermons that confront young men in their congregations with the call of God to the ministry. And we are aware of young men who are "in the pipeline," as it were, having expressed interest in the possibility of pursuing seminary studies. These range from high-school students to those in college, and even some men who are in other career paths. There are a couple of men taking pre-seminary Greek at the seminary. The Lord willing, one of them will enter the seminary in the fall of 2022.

But we must continue to pray—fervently. "The effec-

tual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Let fathers pray fervently in the hearing of their children in their family prayers. Let the Christian school teachers make fervent supplication in their prayers with their students. Let the ministers regularly and fervently in their congregational prayers supplicate the Lord of the church to lay the call to the ministry on the hearts of young men. Let the ministers and elders in their prayers in the catechism classes that they teach and in the family visitations that they conduct earnestly beseech the Lord of the harvest for laborers.

And let every young man consider the call to the ministry. As I have often said, not every young man is called to the ministry, but every young man ought to consider whether God has called him. The harvest in our own congregations and on the mission field is great. That ought to motivate us to pray the Lord of the harvest that He be pleased to raise up laborers—faithful laborers—in our midst.

Bring the books...



Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe, by Voddie T. Baucham, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Salem, 2021). Pp. xviii + 251. \$24.99 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 9781684511808. [Reviewed by Matt Koerner]

If you have been paying attention to the news of late, you have likely seen stories about the debate over whether Critical Race Theory (CRT) ought to be taught in public schools. This debate is only a single facet of a much larger discussion in which the church and world have engaged in recent years over issues that fall under the broad term "social justice." As we look back on the last couple of years, noting all that has happened and the rapid development in these discussions, particularly within the broader church world, we likely feel stunned—how could so much have changed in so little time?

Yet, as Voddie Baucham writes, these changes are not entirely new; the ground has been shifting along a fault line for a long time, and the shocking developments in the public discourse of recent months are only the outworking of this. In light of these changes, "the

Church must be awake and aware of what [such change] means and where it comes from. Otherwise, we will fall victim to it—as many leading Christian voices already have" (2).

But what is this all about? In his introduction, Baucham gives some helpful insight into the subject at hand. He provides definitions and descriptions of such concepts as intersectionality and CRT. Surprisingly, ideas that I had assumed to be very fresh—probably developed within the last five years or so—Baucham shows to have originated at least as early as 1989 (xi). Indeed, then, the fault line has been forming for some time; most Christians simply did not realize it. And this is not all innocent sociology or mere semantics; the word "critical" in Critical Theory and CRT "implies revolution. It is not interested in reform. Hence, we do not 'reform' the police; we 'defund' the police or abolish them.... Critical Theory denies objective truth...it is a philosophy, a worldview" (xiii, xiv). Though the introduction is rather technical, it is important for understanding the broader point Baucham is making in his book.

That broader point is that social justice, CRT, intersectionality, and the like are extremely dangerous, and that the church should not adopt these terms or ideologies. This is a position that is exceedingly unpopular today. Baucham knows this and, for that reason,

the writing of the book was difficult for him; he knew there would be pushback and hurt feelings. And yet, he says,

I wrote this book because I love God more than life, the truth more than others' opinion of me, and the Bride of Christ more than my platform. My heart is broken as I watch movements and ideologies against which I have fought and warned for decades become entrenched at the highest and most respected levels of evangelicalism. I want this book to be a clarion call. I want to unmask the ideology of Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Intersectionality in hopes that those who have imbibed it can have the blinders removed from their eyes, and those who have bowed in the face of it can stand up, take courage, and "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) [230].

This is an honorable goal, and one that underscores the dread seriousness of the topic of Baucham's work.

That dread seriousness begins and ends with the very cross of Jesus Christ. Simply put, the social justice movement and its relatives (CRT, intersectionality, and more) deny the atoning work of Jesus in numerous, different ways. Many today advocate "antiracism," which is supposed to be the answer to the widespread racism and oppression at work in America. Baucham joins others in identifying antiracism as a cult, one with its own "body of divinity," noting the various ways this is so: a new original sin, which is racism; a new gospel, which is racial reconciliation; a new means of atonement, which is reparations; and more (66, 67). That idea of gospel works through in practice, too. The goal of the church, writes Ibram X. Kendi, one of the foremost voices in this area, ought not be to preach 'savior theology,' meaning salvation from personal sin, but liberation from oppressors (28). In addition, as Baucham shows in the pivotal and excellent Chapter 4, the term racism is given a new definition by those in the social justice movement. It is a definition that focuses less on a heart sin and instead on an allegedly oppressive societal structure, the typical term for this being 'systemic racism.' This system, it is alleged, is a uniquely American problem (82).

As Baucham notes, the outworking of this redefinition is that those who are said to be of oppressed people groups—all except white people—not only are not Americans, but they are incapable of the sin of racism (82). Racism, Baucham also shows, has become original sin in this framework, in addition to being the unpardonable sin (80). Earlier, after quoting one evangelical's idea of white supremacy, Baucham writes this: "Notice

how closely [it] mirrors the orthodox doctrine of total depravity. However...this depravity is not shared by all humanity by virtue of having descended from Adam (Rom. 5:12), but is limited to a certain spectrum of the melanin scale" (76). Again, after quoting Romans 3 on the sinfulness of humanity, Baucham writes, "This is not the state of white men; it is the state of all men" (111). Baucham is himself a black man, and as a Calvinistic theologian, he is appalled at the insinuation that he or anyone else is exempt from original sin. To say this is to deny the very need for the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

In addition to denying the black (or otherwise oppressed) person's need for atonement, CRT and antiracism deny the efficacy of Christ's work for the white person. Christ did not do enough; more must be done to have a guilt-free conscience. Antiracism is works-righteousness given a new veneer: white people are told they must constantly do more, give more, and feel sorry more for the injustices of the present, but also and especially those of the past (129). In fact, "Antiracism knows nothing of forgiveness because it knows nothing of the Gospel. Instead, antiracism offers endless penance, judgment, and fear. What an opportunity we have to shine the light of Christ in the midst of darkness!" (229). Indeed; let us do so!

Baucham is not above criticism; he advocates for cultural transformation, a common grace ideal (38); speaks of granting forgiveness to those who have never sought it from him (228); and, in my judgment, does not always qualify as he ought the statistics that he cites. All the same, through a mix of deeper analysis of news stories, prevailing narratives, and statistics; his own personal experiences; and especially solid theology and faithful examination of Scripture, Baucham has written a masterful book on this topic. It is fascinating, saddening, and eye-opening. I recommend it to all readers.

That said, I want to close by especially highlighting one age group: young adults. If you are or your child is a highschooler looking ahead to attending college in the near future or if you/they are already in college, this book is extremely important. The secular ideologies that Baucham addresses in this book proliferate in the college and university. It is the world of academia that teaches these concepts, and for many of us, we do not encounter that world until we step onto our college campus for the first time.

In particular, students at Christian colleges must be warned. I myself attended one such school from 2015-2019. At that time, these ideas were not being taught fully, but they were present in seed form. I would be

saddened but unsurprised if I were to learn that they are now openly taught there. College professors, chapel leaders, and others know how to tug at the heartstrings of well-meaning but ill-informed Christians such as I was. In his recommendation of *Fault Lines*, Josh Buice writes, “The difficulty with social justice is that it appears to be virtuous and it sounds ‘Christian’ when it’s being employed by Christian leaders. However, social

justice is one of the most devious and destructive movements the Church has faced in the last hundred years” (i). We cannot afford to be ignorant on these matters in the social climate in which we are living. Parents, I urge you to make this book required reading for any of your children who attend college. The threat is real; let us be on guard.



News from our churches

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

PRC news (denominational)

Minister calls and activities:

On February 6 **Rev. R. Barnhill** accepted the call to **Heritage PRC** (Sioux Falls, SD), which also meant he declined the call **Hudsonville PRC** had extended to him.

On February 6 **Grace PRC** announced a trio of Revs. J. Laning (Hull PRC), J. Marcus, and C. Spronk (Faith PRC). The congregation was to vote on February 17.

On February 13 **First PRC-Edmonton** announced a new trio: Revs. A. Brummel (Calvary PRC, Hull, IA), E. Guichelaar (Randolph, WI), and S. Regnerus (Lynden, WA). The congregational meeting is planned for February 27.

On February 27 **Rev. J. Langerak** was installed by Rev. R. Hanko as the second pastor in **Covenant of Grace PRC's** history.

On Friday and Saturday, February 11-12, about 30 **PRC ministers and their wives** from both classes gathered for the annual ministers' retreat in Shipshewana, IN. Besides time for informal conversation and recreation, they held discussions centered on the theme of “Taking Heed to Ourselves,” based on I Timothy 4:16. According to their testimony, it was a time of wonderful fellowship and mutual encouragement in the midst of their often-difficult labors. Do we pray daily for our pastors and their wives?

PRC news (congregational)

In the northern part of the U.S., tis' the season for soup suppers, as these notices attest:

In Doon (IA) the **NWIPRS Ladies' Circle** sponsored their annual Soup Supper on February 7 at the Doon Community Center from 5:00 - 7:00 P.M.

Hudsonville PRC's young people hosted one on February 17, along with a silent auction, from 5-7 P.M.

Kalamazoo PRC's Activities Committee planned one for February 16 from 6-7:30 P.M. at the church. The announcement spoke of an evening of “fun and fellowship,” so perhaps more was planned than just a soup dinner. But, certainly, just enjoying good soup with fellow saints is sufficient fun and fellowship!

Lynden PRC (WA) had a congregational fellowship one on February 6—after the morning service! How wonderful to be able to do this!

Randolph PRC (WI) held one at Faith Christian School on February 7.

Meanwhile, in **Loveland PRC**, a special winter luncheon was held February 16 starting at 11 A.M. “for the members of our church in the ‘Golden Age’ of 65+.” Indeed, seniors receive special privileges.

And speaking of seniors, **Grace PRC** is planning the next “Seniors' Retreat,” and according to their flyer it will be held September 20-23 at The Blue Gate Inn and Conference Center in Shipshewana. The theme is “Finding Us Faithful for the Generations That Follow” based on Psalm 78:4-8. Revs. J. Slopsema and S. Key and Prof. Dykstra are the speakers. Plenty of activities are planned at the venue as well as day trips to other places. Registration will open on May 1. Seniors, plan your fall outing to this event now!

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Peace PRC express Christian sympathy to Greg and Elizabeth Bruinsma in the death of their dear son, **Nolan Bruinsma**. We also remember Nolan's grandparents, Keith and Wanda Bruinsma and Don and Mary Terpstra, as well as the many other family members in our church. We pray that they may receive comfort from the Word of God in Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, President Joel Houck, Clerk

Resolutions of sympathy

The Council of Hope PRC of Redlands expresses their Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Steve Potjer and his family in the passing to glory of Steve's father **Mr. Carl Potjer**. May the comfort of Scripture as expressed in songs of the Psalter be theirs.

When I in righteousness at last Thy glorious face shall see,
When all the weary night is past and I awake with Thee
To view the glories that abide, Then, then I shall be satisfied.
Psalter 32 stanza 4 (from Psalm 17)

Rev. Matt Kortus, President Peter Smit, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Randolph, WI extend our Christian sympathies to Joe and Marcia VanBaren, and to Mike and Corrie VanderVeen, Kyle and Marisa VanBaren, Ross and Jill VanBaren, Caleb and Jenn VanBaren, Jeff and Anneke Kuiper, and Tunis and Kayla VanBaren, and their families in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, **Mrs. Shirley VanBaren** who was taken to glory at the age of 91. Psalm 48:14: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, President Jon Regnerus, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. W. Bruinsma/R. Kleyn

- March 6—Made Perfect Through the Promise
Hebrews 11:39, 40
- March 13—Joseph's Dysfunctional Family
Genesis 37:1-11
- March 20—Joseph Is Sold into Slavery
Genesis 37:12-36
- March 27—Joseph's Diligence in a Strange Place and Position
Genesis 39:1-6

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.