

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

April 1, 2022 • Volume 98 • No. 13

The King of the Jews

Rev. John Marcus

The PRCA and the true/false church (2)

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Watering through Apollos

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (8)

Rev. Richard Smit

Teaching our children to tell time

Mrs. Sherry Koole



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster

Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles.

Letters to the editor should be limited to 600 words, be written in a brotherly fashion, and be in response only to published articles (not to published letters). More extensive exchanges on a significant topic of broad interest may be included as guest contributions at the editors' discretion. Letters and contributions will be published at the editor's discretion and may be edited for publication.

All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Subscription price

\$30.00 per year in the US, \$42.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$20.00
esubscription free to current hard copy subscribers.

Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prca.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

Prof. Barry Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Contents

Meditation

- 291 The King of the Jews
Rev. John Marcus

Editorial

- 293 The PRCA and the true/false church (2)
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

- 296 Watering through Apollos
Mr. Kyle Bruinooge

All Thy works shall praise Thee

- 299 In Thy light shall we see light (3)
Dr. Brendan Looyenga

Go ye into all the world

- 302 The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (8)
Rev. Richard Smit

When thou sittest in thine house

- 304 Teaching our children to tell time
Mrs. Sherry Koole

Strength of youth

- 306 Watch your mouth! (5)
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Bring the books...

- 309 *The Riddle of Life*
Dr. Marco Barone

Report of Classis West

- 310 Rev. Joshua Engelsma

News from our churches

- 311 Mr. Charles Terpstra



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

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

The King of the Jews

And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Matthew 27:37

The superscription above Jesus' head is a glorious declaration of the truth of the gospel. Jesus was and is the King of the Jews. The superscription is so significant that all four gospel accounts record it in differing levels of detail. Significantly, all four contain the crucial phrase, "The King of the Jews." We must see Jesus on the cross as the King of the Jews.

Matthew, more than the other gospel accounts, treats the subject of Jesus' kingship and His kingdom. The very first thing Matthew mentions is "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Jesus is not only the promised seed of Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:7), He is also the King promised to David. Not surprisingly, Matthew records the wise men from the East asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:2). When Jesus began His public ministry, Matthew relates that Jesus preached "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23), which implies the coming of the King. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem just before His trial and crucifixion, Matthew tells us "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Matt. 21:4-5).

Significantly, when Jesus was tried and condemned by the Jews and later by Pilate, the accusation that was leveled against Him rested squarely on His kingship. This is why Pilate asked Jesus, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied in the affirmative, "Thou sayest" (Matt. 27:11). When Pilate finally delivered Jesus to the Jews to be crucified, he says, "Behold your King!" (John 19:14). The Jewish leaders repudiated Jesus' kingship, crying out, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Nevertheless, when Jesus was hanged on the cross, it was as the King.

As Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, Pilate ordered the superscription to be put on the cross: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." The superscription above a crucified criminal indicated the charge for which he was being punished. It was also meant to dissuade others from following in the footsteps of the one being punished.

When they saw the superscription, the chief priests said, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21). They hated the idea of Jesus being called their king. Earlier they had cried out against Jesus, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him.... We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). They were like the citizens in Jesus' parable who cried out, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). Obviously they wanted a different kind of kingdom than the spiritual one Jesus came to establish; they wanted an earthly, physical kingdom in which they might live for themselves.

Pilate responded to the chief priests, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22). Pilate may have written the words with a wrong motive, but the ultimate reason for the superscription was the sovereign will of God, who determined that it would thus be written. God wanted it declared to Israel and to the world: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." So the superscription was in Hebrew (the language of the Jews) as well as in Greek and Latin (the language of the world empire). The gospel must be proclaimed to every tribe and tongue.

God wanted it proclaimed that the One hanging on the cross was *Jesus*, none other than Jehovah-salvation come to save His people. God wanted it proclaimed that He is not merely *a* king of the Jews, but *the* King, the one and only King. God wanted it proclaimed that He was and is King *of the Jews*.

Of course, Jesus was never king of the Jews in an earthly sense; He did not sit upon a physical throne in the city of Jerusalem and rule over the tribes of Israel. Rather, Jesus is King in a spiritual sense. His kingdom is composed, not of the physical descendants of Abraham circumcised in the flesh, but of those who are true

Jews. “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:28-29). True Jews are those who seek not their praise from men, but who live before God to the praise of His great and holy name.

God ordained that the superscription would declare the truth of the matter concerning Jesus on the cross. Jesus was there as “the King of the Jews.” He was there for all who are true Jews. What a wonder that Jesus hung on the cross as *our* King!

Strikingly, as the King of the Jews, Jesus was despised and rejected His whole life.

Already at His birth, Jesus was despised by king Herod who sought to kill the One “born King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was despised by the Jewish leaders. Such was their hatred that they would stop at nothing to get rid of Jesus. They were glad when Judas showed that he himself despised Jesus and was willing to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. In their hatred, they even raised false witnesses in their effort to secure Jesus’ condemnation. When the false witnesses did not agree together, the chief priest finally came to the real issue: “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). If Jesus claimed to be the Christ, He would be admitting He was indeed the promised King, the Son of David and the Son of God. When Jesus admitted as much, the chief priest cried, “He hath spoken blasphemy,” and condemned Jesus to die.

Pilate despised Jesus as regards His kingship as well by refusing to serve Jesus when it meant Pilate must renounce himself. He well understood Jesus’ claim to be the King: “Art thou the king of the Jews?” (Matt. 27:11). Jesus admitted as much. Although Pilate tried to release Jesus knowing that he was innocent, he still despised King Jesus enough to hand Him over to be crucified.

The soldiers despised King Jesus when they clothed Him in purple and pressed the crown of thorns onto His head. They despised the King when they drove the nails through His hands and feet in order to fasten Him to the cross. They despised Him when they parted His garments among themselves, caring nothing for the suffering and shame Jesus was experiencing.

The fact that Jesus was crucified between two robbers, guilty of rebellion and insurrection against the

government God had placed over them, shows that Jesus was accounted the chief offender among them.

The passersby mocked Jesus, wagging their heads and calling Him to come down from the cross (Matt. 27:39-40). Also, the chief priests, the scribes, and elders derided King Jesus by saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matt. 27:42). Even the thieves “cast the same in his teeth” (Matt. 27:44). They imagined that because Jesus did not come down from the cross, He was an impostor and no king at all.

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Is. 53:3). Apart from God’s grace we too would only despise King Jesus. Even today, how little we esteem our Savior-King! How often do we refuse to submit to Him as our King? How often do we question whether the King is truly in control of all things? How often do we doubt His goodness?

Jesus, the King of the Jews, was despised and rejected.

But His humiliation must lead to His exaltation and, consequently, to our salvation.

From an earthly perspective, the King’s work to establish His kingdom seemed to be an abject failure. He had preached that the kingdom was at hand (cf. Mark 1:15). However, in the minds of His disciples, all hope of the kingdom was dashed when King Jesus was crucified. How could the King allow Himself to be humbled unto death, even the death of the accursed cross? If we had been among the disciples at that time, no doubt we too would have struggled to make sense of it all. Two things more opposite to our earthly way of thinking could hardly be found: the glorious superscription and the shameful cross, the lofty title calling Jesus “the King of the Jews” in closest connection with the symbol of God’s curse.

Faith, however, believes the Word of God concerning Jesus the King of the Jews. The King was not at all conquered by means of the cross; rather, by means of the cross He conquered. His intentional humiliation on the cross was the way to His exaltation in glory. Everything Jesus did throughout His ministry was leading to the realization of His kingdom, such a kingdom made up of those who are Jews indeed.

Thus, Jesus did not try to escape the accursed death of the cross. Just the opposite, He “set his face to go to Jerusalem” submitting Himself to the will of God (Luke 9:51). Knowing the death that awaited Him, the King

presented Himself in order to suffer on the cross. He knew that this was the way He would come into His kingdom. If the King had come down from the cross, there would be no kingdom. But Jesus remained on the cross, being obedient unto death as the King of the Jews. He suffered the torments of hell in the place of “the Jews,” that is, all His chosen subjects, the elect of every age.

The superscription affixed to the cross shows that Jesus had committed no crime whatsoever because no crime was recorded upon it. Perfectly innocent Jesus was not suffering for Himself; He was suffering as King representing “the Jews.” As the King He was represent-

ing His people who live for God’s praise. The superscription proclaims to us the gospel of Christ’s substitutionary atonement: Jesus our King suffered the curse that we ourselves deserved.

Praise be to God, Christ’s ransom payment was not in vain! The King was crucified and buried; He rose again; He ascended into heaven; and now He sits enthroned at the right hand of God. From heaven “the King of the Jews” rules to gather, defend, and preserve all His elect so that we might live to the praise of His name.

What a glorious gospel proclaimed by the superscription!



Editorial

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois

The PRCA and the true/false church (2)

In this series of editorials, we are examining the distinction between a true church and a false church. The first few editorials are devoted to setting forth a right understanding of that distinction, and then a few other articles will make application of the distinction to the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

In the previous article, we looked at how the Belgic Confession and the Scriptures set forth this distinction. The conclusion we reached was that it is in keeping with the Belgic Confession and the Scriptures to be careful not to imply that one’s own church is the only true church, to be slow to label another church as false, and to distinguish between a false church and an apostatizing church.

In this article, I want to survey how this biblical, Reformed distinction has been applied throughout the history of Reformed churches, with particular emphasis on how it has been applied in the history of the PRC.

In the Reformation

At the time of the Reformation, the Reformed were unanimous in their denunciation of the Roman Catholic Church as a false church. She did not bear the three marks of a true church, but rather their opposite. She had wholly corrupted the gospel of grace with her doctrine of justification by faith and works,

which false teaching was reflected in her teaching on purgatory, indulgences, prayers to saints, the mass, and more. She had wholly corrupted the two sacraments instituted by Christ, not only by adding five other sacraments to them, but also by corrupting the right doctrine of the sacraments, teaching an inherent power and grace in the elements. She had wholly corrupted the proper system of church government by maintaining an unbiblical system of hierarchy, by allowing the grossest immoralities to go unchecked, and by her persecution of faithful saints. While the Reformed generally agreed that there could still be found some of God’s people scattered here and there in Rome, they taught that Christ was not presently savingly there. Therefore, they called those of God’s people left in her to come out. They minced no words in describing Rome: she was the whore, and the pope was the Antichrist.

In keeping with this view, the Reformed also did not hesitate to use the strongest language in their polemics against the Roman Catholic theologians. Calvin, for example, calls Pighius “this ape of Euclid” who “puffs himself off in the titles of all his chapters as a first-rate reasoner.” He writes with respect to Georghius, “All things connected with this miserable creature are so insipid, vain, and disgusting, that I really am ashamed to spend any time or labour in his refutation.” Calvin

called the two of them “a pair of unclean beasts by no means badly matched.”¹

While the Reformed employed strong language against a thoroughly corrupt false church, they were much more careful in the language they employed in addressing the Lutherans. As we noted last time, the Reformed viewed the Lutherans as true churches, in spite of the fact that the Lutherans maintained a wrong view of the Lord’s Supper and of the ascension of Christ.

This was not reciprocated by Luther and his followers. Luther railed against the “sacramentarians,” as he referred to the Reformed. But, according to one author, this was Luther “in his most fiery, and least attractive, moments.”²

Despite the railings of the Lutherans, the Reformed did not respond in kind. Especially was this not the approach of Calvin. According to one author, “No one urged the unity of all evangelical Protestant churches with greater consistency and conviction than John Calvin. All who embraced the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, whether in Germany or Switzerland or France or England, constituted the one true church.”³ Another writer has said, “While Calvin agreed with Luther that the defense of the truth required theologians to engage in polemical discussions...he could not agree with the ferocity of Luther’s attacks on other Protestant reformers...or overlook the self-indulgent character of Luther’s piques and rages.”⁴ Calvin himself wrote, “Often have I been wont to declare, that even although he [Luther] were to call me a devil, I should still not the less hold him in such honour that I must acknowledge him to be an illustrious servant of God. But while he is endued with rare and excellent virtues, he labours at the same time under serious faults.”⁵

In the years that followed, Reformed theologians followed the lead of Calvin. Herman Bavinck summarizes the position of the Reformers:

Furthermore, at least the Reformers soon were or became conscious that the pure administration of

Word and sacrament cannot be considered an absolute mark. Calvin vigorously warned against all arbitrary separation. Even though something is lacking in the purity of doctrine or of the sacraments, even though the holiness of the life and the faithfulness of the ministers leaves much to be desired, one may not for that reason immediately leave the church. One has the duty to leave only when the “high points of necessary doctrine” or “the foremost doctrines of religion” have been exchanged for a lie.

Bavinck goes on to describe how the Reformed in later years followed the lead of Calvin:

When in later years degeneration increased in the state churches and many people felt pressure to leave, the majority of ministers were led to oppose separatism on the same grounds. They all saw themselves compelled, with Calvin, to recognize that in the true church much that is unsound can occur in doctrine and life without this giving people the right to separate from it.... [O]ne had to admit that a true church in an absolute sense is impossible here on earth; there is not a single church that completely and in all its parts, in doctrine and in life, in the ministry of the Word and sacrament, meets the demand of God.

Bavinck concludes,

There was a difference, therefore, between a true church and a pure church. “True church” became the term, not for one church to the exclusion of all others, but for an array of churches that still upheld the fundamental articles of Christian faith but for the rest differed a great deal from each other in degrees of purity.⁶

In the Dutch Secession

The history of the Reformed in the Netherlands in the 1800s is also worth noting. The leaders of the Afscheiding (Secession), which began in 1834, labeled the state church they were leaving a false church. Hendrik de Cock and his congregation stated in their “Act of Secession”: “Taking all of this together, it has now become more than plain that the Netherlands Reformed Church is not the true but the false church, according to God’s word and article 29 of our Confession.”⁷

But what was the condition of that false church? Doctrinally she was corrupt. The Reformed creeds were scuttled. Officebearers were not required to subscribe to the creeds, and many had little knowledge of them. Basic, biblical doctrines were denied by ministers, including the Trinity, total depravity, the perfect

1 Quoted in Gertrude Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken: A Biography of Herman Hoeksema* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 191.

2 David Engelsma, “The Marks of the False Church,” *Standard Bearer* 58, no. 11 (March 1, 1982): 258.

3 P. Y. De Jong, *The Church’s Witness to the World* (St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 1980), 2:268-9.

4 David Steinmetz, as quoted in David Engelsma, “Luther’s Only Truly Congenial Disciple,” in *The Sixteenth-Century Reformation of the Church*, ed. David Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2007), 19.

5 Quoted in David Engelsma, “Luther’s Only Truly Congenial Disciple,” 19.

6 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 4:315-6.

7 Quoted in Marvin Kamps, *1834: Hendrik De Cock’s Return to the True Church* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 246.

sinlessness and humanity of Christ, and the atonement. Church politically she was corrupt. The biblical church government set forth in the Church Order of Dordt was replaced by a hierarchical system of boards appointed by the king. Her worship was corrupted by the enforced singing of Arminian hymns. This church the seceders judged to be false. And this judgment was made after the church had been in decline for 100 years or more.

It is worth pointing out as well that the churches of the Secession were not themselves wholly pure in their doctrine and polity. There were many errors and weaknesses found in those churches. And, yet, no Reformed man or woman would dare to call them false churches.

In the Protestant Reformed Churches

How did Herman Hoeksema, the man used by God to form the PRC, apply the true/false distinction? Though he has often been depicted as a harsh, unbending man, Hoeksema was no fanatic when it came to his use of that distinction.

After having been shamefully treated by the CRC in 1924, Hoeksema did not respond with a radical judgment of the CRC. In a remarkable speech given in 1939 at a conference to discuss the reunion of the CRC and the PRC, Hoeksema said,

But also that which in a broad sense of the word must be considered as belonging to the true Church, because the Word of God is known and proclaimed there in a greater or lesser degree, is characterized by various degrees of pureness. There is difference in pureness of confession, difference with respect to the administration of the sacraments, difference in church-government and in the form of Divine worship. Irrespective even of the false church it will not do to bring under one ecclesiastical roof whatever may have any claim to the name of Church.

Later he said, “According as a church maintains the reformed truth it is purer; according as it departs from that confession it is in that measure less pure.”⁸ The application was clear: Hoeksema viewed the CRC as a true church, albeit one that had seriously erred in her adoption of the false teaching of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel. For this she must be warned and, without rejection of it, no reunion of the two denominations could be possible; but still he was not ready to label her a false church.

Hoeksema’s dealings with Dr. Klaas Schilder and the Liberated Churches in the 1940s and 1950s is also en-

lightening. Hoeksema maintained throughout the controversy that Schilder was his *amice* (Latin for friend), although they differed greatly in their views of the covenant of grace. The Liberated were inclined to hold the position that there is only one true church in the world. But Hoeksema rejected this idea out of hand. In a reply to a letter from a Liberated man named K. C. Van Spronsen, in which the man urged Hoeksema and the PRC to adopt the Liberated position on the church, Hoeksema explained, “And he [Van Spronsen] wants us to reach the conclusion that we, the Protestant Reformed Churches, are the true church and that all the rest are false churches.” He concluded that adopting the Liberated position would mean “that here in Grand Rapids we must have the courage to say that anyone that belongs to a different church than ours or that goes away from our fellowship is lost.” But Hoeksema responded by calling this an “untenable position.” He explained, “Instead, I still prefer our conception of the true church as including all true believers in Christ, and then maintain that we, as Protestant Reformed churches, are the purest manifestation of that church in the world.” He grounded this in the teaching of the Belgic Confession: “I think this is quite in harmony with the confession [Belgic Confession]....”⁹

Elsewhere, Hoeksema wrote, “This does not mean that the believer who takes this calling seriously [the calling to join himself to the purest manifestation of the church in the world] imagines that no one is saved outside of the particular church in which he has his membership.” Another man, in evaluating this quotation and Hoeksema’s position as a whole, wrote, “Herman Hoeksema warns against a fanatical application of the true Church-false Church distinction.”¹⁰

Hoeksema’s biographer says of him:

Often he used forceful language in his editorializing. But a prevailing misconception should be disproved. A careful examination of his editorials and miscellanea will show that he was not harsh nor ruthless, nor did he deal vicious blows to the personalities of his theologian opponents.... Only a very small percentage of his writings held this sharp tone, and he reserved these editorials only for certain men whom he deemed pompous and a bit too self-important. These he lampooned with delight and adroitness.¹¹

9 Herman Hoeksema, “True and False Church,” *Standard Bearer* 27, no. 6 (Dec. 15, 1950), 128-9.

10 D. Engelsma, “The Marks of the False Church,” 258.

11 G. Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken*, 185-6.

8 Herman Hoeksema, “The Reunion of the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches,” *Standard Bearer* 15, no. 14 (April 15, 1939): 328-9.

In summary

This brief survey of church history is significant because it further establishes the Reformed position on the true/false church distinction. Reformed men like Calvin, Bavinck, and Hoeksema understood the distinction in the same way laid out in the previous editorial in this series: There is a spectrum of purity among true churches, and a true church does not become false overnight, but apostasy is a gradual process that takes place over many years. This means practically that one is careful not to imply that one's own church is the only true church, and slow to label another church as false.

Some might attempt to make an absolute distinction

between true and false, labeling any church other than their own as false, and argue that this is the Reformed position. However, this is not the tradition of men like Calvin, Bavinck, and Hoeksema, but is rather a sharp departure from that orthodox, Reformed tradition.

Perhaps a person claims that this absolute distinction is a new insight and development of doctrine. But one must reckon with the fact that this is not in harmony with the Scriptures, nor is it the spirit and intention of the Reformed confessions. One must also reckon with the reality that this is a substantial shift from 400 years of Reformed orthodoxy.



Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge teaches New Testament history at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan and member of Faith PRC

Watering through Apollos

I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

I Corinthians 3:6

The diversity that is found in the church of Jesus Christ is an amazing wonder. Many different spiritual gifts are represented in each congregation, and God uses each one to refresh and strengthen the other members. In this way, Christ, the Head of the church, is glorified.

In a more specific sense, the office of the ministry provides diversity. Men with different strengths and weaknesses sound forth a common gospel message each week. God overrules their sin and weakness and uses the “foolishness” of preaching to save His people (I Cor. 1:21).

Examples of the rich diversity of those who preach the gospel can be seen in Paul's companions. Through his relationship with them, Paul teaches us the proper attitude that we must have for those who are called to be mouthpieces for Jesus Christ.

In the previous *Standard Bearer* article on Aquila and Priscilla (January 1, 2022), we saw the theological transformation that lowly tentmakers brought to a brilliant man named Apollos.

But who was this brilliant man? He is mentioned ten times in the New Testament, and seven of those references are found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthi-

ans. As we will see, the relationship between Paul and Apollos was intriguing, especially within the context of the fledgling Corinthian church and the party strife that divided them. This relationship provides us with several valuable lessons about how to view undershepherds in the church.

Apollos was a Jew born in Alexandria, a city located where the Nile River meets the Mediterranean Sea in Egypt (Acts 18:24). During the first century Alexandria was considered the second city of the Roman Empire, with an impressive population of at least 600,000 people. Many of its inhabitants were Jews, and it had a reputation of being a place of learning.

In Alexandria, Greek culture and Jewish religion met. A product of this synthesis was the famous Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, completed some 150 years prior to the birth of Christ. In this connection, the Bible's descriptions of Apollos match his Alexandrian origin, a place of higher learning and knowledge.

This is the background for Apollos coming to Ephesus at the conclusion of Paul's second missionary journey (cf. map on next page). From Corinth, just prior, Paul had crossed the Aegean Sea with Aquila and Priscilla, coming to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21). After a short time, Paul left them there and sailed for Antioch. At

some point after Paul left, Apollos came to Ephesus.

Aquila and Priscilla saw in Apollos the characteristics that Luke records in Acts 18:24-25: eloquence in speech, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in the spirit, and patient in teaching. All good characteristics, except for one problem: Apollos was not preaching the full reality of Christ, but only the baptism of John.¹ His preaching was devoid of Christ and the outpouring of His Spirit, and the Lord corrected him through Aquila and Priscilla so that he could support Paul in his mission of preaching Christ to those who were lost (18:26).

After the conclusion of the second journey, while Paul was making preparations for his third journey, Apollos left Ephesus and came to Corinth (Acts 18:27). He may have been attracted by the large Jewish population in Corinth, but he also had a new excitement for using his gifts to preach the true gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in Corinth. The gifts of rhetoric, logic, and debate that he learned in the schools of Alexandria helped him reason with the Jews in the synagogue, showing that Christ was our only firm hope (I Pet. 3:15). Therefore, the Lord used him “mightily [to] convince the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:28).

After a period in Corinth, Apollos returned to Ephesus. Around the same time, Paul was leaving the Galatian churches on his third missionary journey, planning to settle in with the Ephesians for over two years (Acts 20:31). Here is where Paul and Apollos met for the first time.

Both Paul and Apollos were well educated Jews, but they were men with different styles, personalities, and life experiences. Apollos had greater gifts of speech and eloquence than Paul, who by his own admission was less skilled in speaking (II Cor. 11:6). Apollos may have been able to draw crowds more quickly, while Paul had to work harder to grab the attention of his audience (I Cor. 1:17). Paul certainly had the gift of rhetoric when presenting the clarity of the gospel before crowds and rulers (Acts 17:22-31, 22:1-21, 24:10-21, 26:1-29); yet he may not have had the same level of eloquence and charisma that Apollos possessed (II Cor. 10:10).

In spite of these differences, the beautiful thread of the truth of Christ crucified was woven throughout their preaching.

Therefore, as Paul labored in Ephesus, Apollos assisted him greatly so that the Word could go forth throughout



Asia Minor (Acts 19:10). Apollos must have been a valuable asset to the missionary program through his gifts, abilities, and strengthened understanding of the gospel.

During this time in Ephesus, however, Paul received a report from the devout house of Chloe that there were several problems in the Corinthian church, namely, divisions and party strife, undisciplined fornication, and excessive squabbles in Roman courts (I Cor. 1:11-12, 5:1-2, 6:1). In addition to these serious problems, three men from the Corinthian community traveled to Paul in Ephesus, asking him several questions and advice on various topics (12:17). All of this prompted Paul's extensive first letter to the Corinthians.

Shortly after the first letter to the Corinthians was faithfully delivered and read in the congregation, Paul received a report from Timothy that the situation there had actually worsened (II Cor. 2:1-4). As Paul balanced his frustration towards the impenitence of the Corinthians with his continued efforts with the Ephesians, he desired Apollos to go to Corinth to instruct and correct them. Paul describes Apollos' decision in I Corinthians 16:12: "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time."

A simple eye-test of the passages reveals nothing of much significance. Paul makes a request, and Apollos was unable to go because of his present commitments in the work of the ministry. Paul understood Apollos' reasons, but in light of the backdrop of Paul's request and the serious need of the Corinthians for correction, Apollos would have been immensely helpful. After all, he had just developed a relationship with the Cor-

¹ Don Doezema, *Upon this Rock*, Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Protestant Reformed Sunday School Teachers Association, 2003), 290.

inthians, and would have been well qualified to work through their problems carefully with them. Therefore, the request was carefully calculated by Paul; yet, in spite of Apollos' inability to acquiesce, God used Timothy and Titus to provide much-needed assistance (I Cor. 4:17, 16:10, II Cor. 7:13).

Paul's revelation of this simple request is even more significant when we learn that Paul himself ended up making a separate trip to see the situation in Corinth. This visit ended poorly, with him being verbally attacked by Jewish opponents there.² Paul reveals this separate trip within the larger scope of the third journey in his second letter to the Corinthians (II Cor. 10:10, 12:14, 13:1).

This separate trip prompted him to write a very painful letter to the Corinthians, in which he admonished them sharply, writing with many tears, pleading for their repentance (2:4, 7:8-12). Unlike I and II Corinthians, this letter has not been preserved but has been omitted by the Spirit from the New Testament canon.

Paul's request for Apollos to go to Corinth does not necessarily mean there was conflict between them. There was already party strife surrounding these men. "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas [Peter]; and I of Christ" (I Cor. 1:12). Church members were clinging to different personalities in the church, namely, Paul and Apollos (3:4-5, 22). As an apostle, Paul possessed a higher level of authority than Apollos, but in this instance, Paul's desire was to pursue peace and unity in the church. Therefore, Paul writes to the Corinthians that "he will come when he shall have convenient time" (16:12).

Transcending these minor logistical details, the almighty, sovereign God rules, maintaining and preserving His church—in Corinth, Ephesus, or wherever she is found today.

And yet there remains one last reference in the New Testament to Apollos. Almost ten years after the Corinthian context, Paul seeks Apollos again through his letter to Titus: "Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them" (Tit. 3:11). Apollos must have been used in the organization of the church on the island of Crete, for Paul mentions him in one of his final letters. Jerome, the monk who translated the Latin Vulgate in c. 405, concluded that because of the dissensions in Corinth, Apollos left the surrounding circumstances and traveled

south to nearby Crete. He decided to return once things had been resolved and settled after Paul's epistles to the Corinthians.³

Therefore, as Paul plans to rendezvous with Titus in Nicopolis to bring instruction and encouragement for the work going on in Crete (Tit. 3:12), Apollos is sought again, indicating that he continued faithful to the gospel and may have been used to assist and mentor young Titus. The transformation that was worked through lowly tentmakers and strengthened through Paul remained in Apollos, and he continued to water and refresh the church in service to God.

It has been well established that Apollos was Jewish, knowledgeable, and skilled in debate and oratory. These characteristics have led many, including Martin Luther, to suggest that Apollos was the author of Hebrews.⁴ In a letter emphasizing the fulfillment of Jesus Christ over against the types and shadows of the Old Testament, Apollos as author fits the writing style of a man with an expansive education, particularly of the Old Testament. He was well versed in Scripture and had the ability to engage his fellow Jews. If he was indeed the author, then it solidifies the clear gospel message that he would have preached to the Jews in both Ephesus and Corinth.

Nonetheless, the relationship of Paul and Apollos within the Corinthian context provides important lessons for us in how to view God's undershepherds in the church.

First, Paul valued the diversity of the men and women who helped support the gospel ministry in the first century, but knew with certainty that God alone receives the glory for the growth of the church. He recognized that "he planted, and Apollos watered," but through their efforts "God gave the increase." God uses different skill sets in the planting and watering process of the church.⁵ It is a wonder that God not only uses the foolish things (preaching) of this world, but also those who are often foolish themselves (preachers) on account of their sin and weakness.

Second, Paul and Apollos did not possess any independent significance; rather, their unity was in their sub-service to God who called them to their work. They certainly had their differences in personality. No minister is a carbon-copy of another—nor should they be.

3 Jerome, *St. Jerome's Commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 347.

4 John H. Bratt, *New Testament Guide* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), 106.

5 Corin Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship and Paul's Stance Towards Greco-Roman Rhetoric: An Exegetical and Socio-Historical Study of I Corinthians 1-4* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2009).

2 J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 140.

Paul's beautiful instruction on spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12 applies to the church as a whole *and* to the office of the ministry. God's servants work alongside each other, laboring *together*, for the building up of the church (I Cor. 3:9).

Third, the truth of the cross overpowers and overcomes any strengths or weakness that men may evidence as they preach the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), and the Corinthians needed Paul's emphasis on believing the power of the cross rather than the attraction that men may portray as they take the pulpit. Such attraction is vain. The focus is on the *preaching*, not the preacher. For in the *preaching of the Word*, there is power. bHerman Hoeksema has written,

It is the preaching of the Word that brings Christ to the consciousness of the sinner. Without that preaching, therefore, there can never be in this life an active and conscious laying hold on Christ and on all the benefits of salvation.⁶

Fourth, strong intellect and gifts of oratory do not necessarily equate to the "lively preaching of the Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35, Q&A 98). Lively preaching of Christ where "two or three are gathered in His name" brings glory to God (Matt. 18:20). In contrast, a throng of thousands who hang on the clever

words of a man's "wisdom" can have their souls left empty and void (Is. 55:11).

As you consider these lessons, what expectations do you have for your undershepherd? Are you naturally drawn to someone who challenges and stimulates you intellectually? Do you prefer the out-going, social type? While there are many personality types with various strengths and weaknesses, the central focus must be hearing the words of Christ. Fight natural man's urge to follow the mouthpiece, who is merely an instrument. Listen for *Christ*, for you will know His voice (John 10:27).

Some men can use persuasive speech, be knowledgeable in the Scriptures, and draw a crowd like no other. In the end, however, they will be judged according to the divine standard of the gospel message that they preached. Not because of their efforts, but through the power of Christ (II Cor. 13:4).

Paul planted, Apollos watered, but in the end God alone through His Spirit gave the increase, making the seed of the Word sprout and planting Christ into the fertile soil (hearts) of those who heard the gospel. Just as the water from the watering can has no power in itself to give life to the seed in the ground, so Apollos had no power in himself to make God's Word effective in the hearts of sinners. Rather, the God who is pleased to ordain the means is the sole power to make it effective, directing the water's path and using it to produce the fruit He wills—in the natural realm and in the spiritual realm. Dear Christian, seek not the man, but seek Christ, the fountain of all good.

⁶ Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge, Volume VIII, Love the Lord Thy God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1955), 74-75.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Dr. Brendan Looyenga, former college professor now working as a professional research scientist for the medical diagnostics industry, and member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

In Thy light shall we see light (3)

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2022, p. 210.

One of the great wonders of God's inspired words in Scripture is that they are often revealed to us in the form of a mystery. These "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" serve to reinforce the faith of those who are given to understand and to harden the hearts of those who reject God and His Son. Such was the explanation offered by Christ when He was asked by His disciples the reason for His teaching in parables (Matt. 13:10-17). And such is the purpose of the frequent paradoxes

that we encounter throughout Scripture. It is to this pedagogical device that we turn in this article.

A *paradox* is a statement or observation that initially seems to be self-contradictory, but when understood correctly reveals something that is essentially true. Some of the most profound truths of Scripture are paradoxical in nature. Among the greatest of these is the biblical teaching that salvation from sin and death was won by a Savior who came in the weakness of human flesh as a suffering

Servant (Is. 53). To the unbelieving mind, Jesus' lifelong suffering and eventual death on the cross seem utterly incompatible with His identity as the promised Messiah (I Cor. 1:18-25). And yet that is precisely the message of the gospel that the believing mind grasps and celebrates as the greatest victory ever won. Through death came eternal life. Such is the mystery of the gospel!

The title of our series on light, which is taken from Psalm 36:9, represents another biblical paradox—this time with multiple layers of embedded meaning. The apparent contradiction in the phrase “in Thy light shall we see light” comes from the fact that we do not usually require a second source of illumination to see the light being emitted by a primary source. Or to say it another way, we do not need a flashlight to know that the sun is shining. To the unbelieving mind, the words of this passage seem foolish. But with eyes of faith we behold a multifaceted gem of truth that reflects the glory of God in a variety of ways. The goal of this article is to help readers understand our passage of interest through the eyes of faith, so that together we may give glory to the Creator of light who has graciously revealed Himself to us in His Word.

The paradox of light

From a scientific perspective, light is the perfect creature with which to illustrate the concept of a paradox. This is due to the fact that several of its properties are difficult to reconcile with the laws of physics that we use to describe everyday experiences, like riding in a car or surfing on an ocean wave. For centuries, scientists struggled to make sense of the contradictory properties of light that suggested it was both a wave and a particle.¹ This sort of dual identity was incompatible with the known laws of physics until the early twentieth century when the field of quantum mechanics was born. Only with this new understanding as a theoretical foundation were scientists able to explain these apparent contradictions.

Perhaps a more accessible way to illustrate the paradoxical nature of light is to point to the fact that sunlight is necessary for life to exist on earth, but that it can also be deadly. In photosynthesis sunlight gives life, but when exposed directly to unprotected cells it brings death.

In the first article of this series, we briefly discussed the properties of light as a type of energy that travels in *waves*. There we noted that the different colors of visible

light, as well as all of the other forms of radiant energy, differ in their wavelengths and in the amount of energy they carry. Radiant energy with very short wavelengths (less than violet light) carries a higher amount of energy, whereas radiant energy with longer wavelengths (greater than red light) carries a lower amount of energy. This is the reason that we worry about getting exposed to ultraviolet (UV) light and X-rays (both of which have short wavelengths and are high in energy), but not radio waves, which are very low in energy due to their long wavelengths. The energy in UV light and X-rays is capable of damaging the genetic material (DNA) found in living cells, whereas radio waves cannot.

The paradox in the observation that sunlight is necessary for life but can kill living cells is explained by the fact that it is composed of a variety of wavelengths that together make up the entire visible spectrum of light. The spectrum of rainbow colors we see when sunlight passes through raindrops nicely illustrates this point, though even then we fail to see all of the radiant energy that is present. Red light, which is lower in energy due to its longer wavelength, is the primary driver of photosynthesis through its interaction with the pigment chlorophyll found in plant leaves. UV light, which is high in energy due to its shorter wavelength, can kill unprotected cells by virtue of its interaction with the chemical building blocks of DNA. Though similar in terms of the physics involved, these two processes yield drastically different effects on living organisms. Properly understood, the paradox of sunlight yields an amazing truth that gives glory to our Creator!

Unraveling the theological paradox

The enigmatic phrase contained in Psalm 36:9 is revealed as a paradox—and not a contradiction—when we understand the various ways that Scripture uses light as a theological metaphor. The second article in this series demonstrated that in its broadest sense, light represents the entirety of divine *revelation*. When light is used as a metaphor in Scripture, it may also refer to the *mode* by which God reveals Himself (through His Word and in the person of Christ) or to the *content* of His revelation (most specifically favor, truth, and righteousness).

In many cases, the Bible pairs the metaphor of light with darkness in order to paint a contrast between two diametrically opposed ideas. Righteousness and iniquity. Life and death. Favor and hatred. Truth and lie. All of these spiritually significant opposites are aptly represented by the concepts of light and darkness.

What then are we to make of Psalm 36:9 with so many potential ways to understand the idea of light? What truth is God revealing in this passage?

¹ Interested readers who would like to learn more about the historic discoveries that led to our modern understanding of light are encouraged to peruse the following article. “Light: Is it a Wave or a Particle?” *Canon Science Lab*. https://global.canon/en/technology/s_lab/light/001/11.html.

The first approach we can take to grasp the meaning of the passage is to look at the immediate context, which begins in verse 7 with the exclamation, “How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!” and ends with the plea, “O continue thy lovingkindness...and thy righteousness,” in verse 10. The word “lovingkindness” used here is an expression of God’s favor (or grace) displayed to His people, while His righteousness refers to the uprightness of His character and judgments. Light is frequently used to represent God’s favor and righteousness, so we can determine from the immediate context of Psalm 36:9 that God’s righteous character is revealed by His lovingkindness toward His people. In His light (favor) we see light (righteousness).

The broader context of Psalm 36 is also helpful. Note that the opening four verses of this Psalm begin with commentary on the wickedness of natural man in whom is found nothing but iniquity, deceit, and mischief. This picture of the darkness of human nature stands in stark contrast to the light that is revealed in the person of God, who is perfectly upright in His character. The intentional use of this contrast between the evil of man and the goodness of God further supports the interpretation of verse 9 offered above.

But I think we can say more about the phrase “in Thy light shall we see light,” since it is somewhat of a recurring motif in other similar texts in Scripture. We note two of these passages below.

Micah 7:7-9 similarly contains multiple references to light, but in this case the purpose is to reveal Christ, who brings salvation to those who are condemned in their sins through His work as the perfectly righteous Mediator of the covenant. The text reads as follows:

Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, *the LORD shall be a light unto me*. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until *he plead my cause*, and execute judgment for me: *he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness*.

This passage is no doubt pointing to the atoning work of Christ, the righteous One, as the Mediator of the covenant who is revealed by God (the LORD). The contrast between darkness and light used here paints a similar contrast to that used in Psalm 36. But in this case, through the light of revelation we see Jesus, who is

the righteousness of God. In Thy light (revelation) we see light (Jesus Christ)!

Another striking example of the “light revealing light” motif is found in Luke 24:13-33, which records the appearance of the risen Lord to two travelers on the road to Emmaus. The story recounts a remarkable opening of the eyes of faith of Cleopas and his unnamed companion as they speak with the risen Lord. Verses 30-32 of the text are quoted below:

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

Despite the fact that the word “light” is never used in this passage, there remains a beautiful example of light revealing light as Jesus explains the gospel of grace to His two disciples through the lens of the Old Testament Scriptures. The result of His explanation was a spiritual opening of their eyes to the truth that Christ had indeed risen in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Him.

In effect, this passage in Luke 24 presents a different way to understand the phrase “in Thy light shall we see light.” *Jesus Christ* took in hand the written *Word* of God to reveal the *truth* about Himself to two of His followers. All three elements of this narrative—Christ, God’s Word, truth—are commonly represented by the metaphor of light throughout Scripture. Here we see the “Light of the world” revealing that God’s words to His people throughout

Here we see the “Light of the world” revealing that God’s words to His people throughout the redemptive history have come true. In Thy light (Jesus Christ) we see light (truth of God’s Word)!

the redemptive history have come true. In Thy light (Jesus Christ) we see light (truth of God’s Word)!

It never ceases to amaze me how one small phrase in Scripture can reveal so much about our covenant God. And while diligent study of His Word can reveal much to us, there remains a sense of mystery that I suspect will remain with us for all eternity. Blessed be the Father of lights in whom there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17)!

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)



Go ye into all the world

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

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (8)

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2022, p. 274.

According to our examination of the historical examples in foreign missions of a commitment to the three-self formula, the three aspects of this formula should be somewhat familiar. However, it is beneficial that we have a clear description of the self-government, self-support, and self-propagation of an indigenous, autonomous church institute that functions faithfully in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.

First, what is the “self-government” element of the three-self formula?

As defined by Robert Decker,¹ self-government means that

in the biblical and confessional sense...each congregation is under the care of Christ by means of properly called, qualified officebearers. These must be natives...these men must be trained to assume leadership in the congregation.²

This principle has been described similarly by Rev. D. Kleyn as follows:

The basic idea of a self-governing church is that she is one in which the officebearers are local men. The ministers, elders, and deacons are not foreign missionaries or other men who may have moved to the field from the sending churches. Rather, the special offices are occupied by nationals. An indigenous church is one that has local men, chosen by local congregations, to be the local representatives of Christ in its midst.³

In light of this principle, the government of the indigenous church is not characterized by two extremes.

First, the government of the local church is not exercised from outside the congregation in another distant place, which, for example, characterizes the hierarchical form of church government and missions of the Roman Catholic Church. In this erroneous system of church government, decisions for the local church and its members are ultimately made in the higher levels of the hierarchical system. Decisions about the purchase of the property connected with a local church are made by those in another part of the locale or in an altogether foreign country where the person in higher authority must make such decisions. This is not the biblical principle of “self-government.”

Secondly, the local church is not governed under the hierarchy of one man, perhaps the pastor or another influential leader in a local church. This can appear in small, independent congregations where the government of the church is according to the whim and decisions of the most influential person in the leadership of that church. While in this situation the government of the church is certainly local, it is not, however, what the principle of “self-government” means.

“Self-government” means that the *church* governs, not one individual of a church. The church institute that governs is represented in its local officebearers as a body. The church institute, through its council of qualified officebearers, makes decisions about the ordination and installation of men into the special offices. She makes decisions about the confession and walk of her members. She governs her liturgy. She oversees the purity of the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. She exercises Christian discipline upon the impenitent. She makes decisions about the financial support of the work of the church. She distributes the benevolence for the care of the poor. She trains men for the ministry of the Word. She sends out her own missionaries in her region. She decides to seek the unity of the church of Jesus Christ in a local federation that is also characterized by the three-self formula in relationship to other and foreign denominations.

1 Robert Decker (1940-2021) is former Professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. In addition to other subjects in the area of practical theology, he taught missions from 1973 to 2006.

2 Robert Decker, “Missionary Methods (28),” *Standard Bearer* 61, no. 14 (April 15, 1985): 329.

3 Rev. Daniel Kleyn, “A Goal in the Philippines: Self-Governing Churches,” *Standard Bearer* 88, no. 4 (Nov. 15, 2011): 90. Rev. Daniel Kleyn has been serving as foreign missionary of the PRCA in the Philippines from 2009 to the present.

She decides as a federation to seek contact with other Reformed churches, and, if possible, in sister-church relationships. She has both the right and the duty to govern.

However, “self” does not mean that the local church governs according to her own will and whim, doing whatever she wants, however she wants, and whenever it feels right. Rather, she has been invested with spiritual authority to rule the church according to the will of Jesus Christ, the King, which is revealed in the inspired Holy Scriptures, summarized systematically in our Reformed Confessions, and according to our biblical and Reformed church order.

Secondly, what is the “self-support” element of the three-self formula? When thinking of this principle,

...nearly everyone thinks of but one thing when he hears the word, “self-supporting,” viz., money. The mission churches ought to be financially independent from the very outset. To build churches for the converts, to pay the salaries either in whole or in part of the native preachers, to assist the converts in ways, other than benevolence, is bad mission practice.⁴

Concluding with some practical applications of the self-support principle, R. Decker wrote that this principle

...is proper we believe. Converts ought to build their own churches and support their own preachers. Churches need not be elaborate buildings costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Native preachers ought to be supported by the congregation which they serve. Where this is done things will be done “decently and in good order.”⁵

In other words, the church characterized by self-support is one that

...supports itself. The church supports its own ministers and ministerial training. The church supports and does its own benevolence work. The church supports its own building projects and mission work. In a nutshell, a self-supporting church does not depend upon financial support from others.⁶

A Presbyterian foreign missionary observed that without the “self-support” element a church cannot be a thriving and faithful church:

When foreign funds are used to provide the pastor for a church group, such support almost inevitably fosters a dependent spirit among the people. It weakens them, because it relieves them of the necessity of using their own resources to the fullest to forward the work for

which God has made them responsible.... A church dependent upon foreign funds will also be handicapped in its evangelistic expansion work.⁷

A self-supporting church is one that seeks the kingdom of God first, gives of the firstfruits of her weekly income to the support of the ministry of the gospel and the training of new pastors. A self-supporting church is one whose covenant households and individuals sacrifice themselves and a high-percentage of their resources to the Lord Jesus Christ in thanksgiving for the continuation of the proclamation of His Word and the government of the same in their indigenous church and federation. Hence, a self-supporting church learns to live and operate, not according to the economic and cultural standards of a foreign church or federation with whom she may have fellowship, but rather according to the economic standards of her own God-given and governed economic setting. A self-supporting church submits to the providence of God with regards to her financial resources and remains content with where God has placed her economically. A self-supporting church and indigenous federation resists the pitfall of dependency with respect to foreign churches and the pitfall of paternalism with respect to her very own native mission stations.

That has been the goal of the PRCA in its work in the Philippines. The PRCA does not desire

to produce congregations that must depend and rely on foreign churches. Our goal is to produce and nurture churches that are able to stand alone. Our goal is churches that are able to do the work of the church by using what God has provided for them in this work.⁸

Finally, what is the “self-propagation” element of the three-self formula? R. Decker explained that

[by] this we mean that the newly organized congregation of believers and their children under the care of Christ through the officebearers has the mandate of Christ to “go into all the world” preaching and teaching the gospel. The mission calling applies with equal force to them as to the older, established, sending churches.⁹

This same understanding is echoed by Rev. Kleyn in his description of this principle:

Every church of Christ on earth is called to carry out the great commission. Every church must go forth into the world and preach the gospel. Beginning in her own land, every church must pass on the truth to others.

4 Decker, “Methods (28)”: 328.

5 Decker, “Methods (28)”: 328.

6 Rev. Daniel Kleyn, “A Goal in the Philippines: Self-supporting Churches (1),” *Standard Bearer* 89, no. 13 (April 1, 2013): 298.

7 John M.L. Young, *Missions: The Biblical Aim and Motive*. (Pittsburgh: Covenant and Crown Publications, 2007): 141-142.

8 Rev. Daniel Kleyn, “A Goal in the Philippines: Self-Propagating Churches (2),” *Standard Bearer* 88, no. 15 (May 1, 2012): 357.

9 Decker, “Methods (28)”: 329.

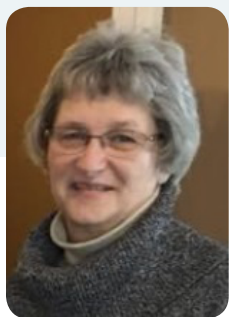
A self-propagating church is one that is busy in this work. She wants others to hear, to know, and to have the truth. She is not selfish with the truth, but speaks of it boldly to others around her.¹⁰

The local, indigenous church must be characterized from the outset as “self-propagating.” The term in the strict sense, as defined above, is not a reference to the spiritual growth and viability of a particular congregation. The viability and growth of a congregation is the Lord’s gift and blessing upon a church that is faithfully self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Hence, the term, in a strict sense, is a reference to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ by which

the church is gathered and grows. The local church “self-proclaims” the Word of God. She “self-preaches” the gospel. She “self-proclaims” it promiscuously. She authoritatively calls sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In so doing, she fulfills what she exists to do in behalf of Christ in the earth according to her mandate in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47-49, and Acts 1:7-8. She must preach His gospel throughout the world, wherever and whenever He by His Spirit is pleased to send her.

In conclusion, then, what does this threefold formula mean in just one word for the local indigenous church? A healthy, indigenous church institute is in her very character *Christian*. Therein lies the legitimacy of the three-self formula, to which thought we will give some attention next time.

10 Rev. Daniel Kleyn, “A Goal in the Philippines: Self-Propagating Churches (1),” *Standard Bearer* 88, no. 13 (April 1, 2012): 295.



When thou sittest in thine house

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

Teaching our children to tell time

But, LORD, in Thee is all my trust, Thou art my God I cried; My life, my times are in Thy hand, I in Thy strength confide.

Psalter #80, stanza 9

We are all creatures of time. For the timeless God, in His infinite wisdom, created us so. He, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, has so designed things that all of our life here on earth—as we journey from here to heaven—is governed by time. Not only must we teach our children how to tell time on the face of the clock that hangs on the kitchen or dining room wall, or how to tell the day, month, or year by the calendar that may hang on that very same wall, but we must teach them how everyday life is governed by *time(s)* as well. They learn that each day holds breakfast time, dinner time, supper time, and bedtime. They learn already in the early years of childhood that there is not only a time to play but also a time to work. At a very young age they learn that Sunday is a day set apart from the rest, in which there are designated

times for congregational worship. As young people, they learn the time—and the importance of keeping the time—of curfew. And the list goes on, for this is only a sampling of the different times that we and our children experience throughout the course of life.

As parents, it is important that we teach our children the instruction Scripture gives regarding time. In Ecclesiastes 3:1 we read that there is “a time to every purpose under the heaven.” We are born, and we die; we laugh, and we cry; we build up, and we tear down; there are times of embracing, and times to refrain from embracing; times of love as well as times of hate; and times of war as well as times of peace. Such are the times of life. And God has a purpose in all of them. As the Lord sees fit to lead us through the joys and sorrows of life, our children must learn and know—as well as be assured of and comforted by the fact—that our lives and times are securely held in the palm of His almighty hand. This is our assured confidence, that just as the Almighty, everywhere present God has a time and a purpose for everything, He will most assuredly uphold and preserve

His children through all the joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures, and other various times of life.

Already in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, time was a facet of His creation. At the end of each day of creation week, we read that the evening and the morning constituted the day. On the fourth day, God created the sun, moon, and stars to divide the day from the night and the darkness from the light (Gen. 1:14, 18). When it is light, our children know it is daytime. When it is dark, they know it is nighttime. And so we must ask them, “Can you tell us the time?” For it is necessary, extremely necessary that they be able to do so. They need to be aware of the time in which the Lord has us living, the truth about it, and how they should conduct and behave themselves as they live in it.

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

Romans 13: 11, 12

I can recall bits and pieces of a sermon in which the verses quoted above were either the text or a part of the text on which the sermon was based. The verses surrounding them could very well have been included as well. It was preached ten or more years ago during a time of vacancy in my congregation. Although I cannot recall the theme of the text or the main points that went along with it, I do remember being called several times to “Wake up!”—not in the literal sense as to being asleep during the sermon but to “wake up” spiritually in regards to the *time* in which we are living.

What time is it then? God’s Word is very clear. The inspired apostle Paul writes, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” Knowing that these words were penned almost 2,000 years ago, one might be led to think that *the day*, being at hand then, most surely should have dawned by now. But the child of God knows that God is not bound by time and that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (II Pet. 3:8). Therefore, we must take these words of Scripture and instruct our children as to how they apply to our lives today. Though *the night* is far spent, it is not over. We are living in the night. We are surrounded by darkness. And the darkness will only continue to deepen...until the dawning of the day.

We live in a world of darkness. Spiritual darkness. Sin abounds on every side—drunkenness, rioting, covetousness, pride, sexual immorality, hatred, murder, greed, lying, discontent, stealing, slandering, and all other forms

of ungodliness. We need to call our children (along with ourselves) to *wake up*, take heed, and know exactly what *time* it is. It is night! It is dark! And the lawlessness and wickedness of this world will only intensify with time. Sexual immorality will increase—modern-day technology makes pornography and enticing videos, TV shows, music, books, magazines, and such just a hands-breadth or click of a button away. Murder will increase—not only the violent murder of the taking of another’s life, but also the legalized and just as violent murder of the unborn; and add to that the hatred (murder) of the neighbor that is done by the thoughts of one’s heart and the slandering words of one’s lips. Wars and rumors of wars will increase—although we may not have been adversely affected as of yet, one need only to read, watch, or listen to the news to know that this is true. Opposition and hatred for God and His church will also increase and continue to increase over time. Persecution and controversy from within and without will intensify. The Devil is hard at work seeking to destroy the church—working first to destroy the lives of the covenant families within her (divorce and remarriage, rebellious children, and the like). He works especially hard on our young people (the present and future church), placing greater pressures and temptations upon them, doing all in his power to get them to conform to this world. All of these evils, along with many others belonging to this sin-cursed world, will only continue to increase and intensify as *time* goes on.

Therefore, we are exhorted—commanded really—by God: “Children, wake up! Stay awake! The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light!” This is the calling of God’s people. And our children need to learn that this is not a one-time calling, but a life-long calling. We are to live as children of light in a world of darkness. Simply put, we must live the life of the antithesis. We must live godly in a godless world. Live according to God’s law in a lawless world. Live out of love for God in a loveless world. And live with the hope of heaven in a world that has no hope.

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world.... I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

(Jesus’ high-priestly prayer—John 17:14, 15)

Being instructed to *put on the armor of light* is a calling to prepare for battle. The darkness hates the light and does its very best to extinguish it. As children of the light, we must stand in opposition to the darkness of this world, even taking the offensive over against it. After Jesus describes the life and blessedness of those

who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven as recorded in the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5, He says, “Ye are the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (vv. 14, 16). This is God’s purpose regarding the present-day time. We are to bring glory to His Name in all that we say and do. As citizens of the kingdom of heaven and children of the Most High God, we are called to live an antithetical life. We are called to live holy in an unholy world. In I Peter 1:15, 16, the apostle Peter exhorts the people, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [conduct and walk of life]: Because it is written, BE YE HOLY; FOR I AM HOLY.” In writing these words, my mind cannot help but wander to the words of the well known hymn:

Take time to be holy, Speak oft with thy Lord, Abide in Him always and feed on His Word. Make friends of God’s children, Help those who are weak, Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, The world rushes on, Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone. Abiding in Jesus like Him thou shalt be, Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, Be calm in thy soul, Each thought and each motive beneath His control, Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love, Thou soon shall be fitted for service above.

Our lives must be characterized by love for God. We must not sit idly by in spiritual separation from the world; but rather, as we view the darkness of this world in the light of God’s holy law, we live in joyful accord with that law, giving a witness to all around that we belong to Him and are children of the light. We and our

children must be ready to give an answer when asked for a reason of the hope that lies within us. And such an inquiry of our hope will never come unless our lives first give evidence to the fact that we are a peculiar and holy people, set apart from the rest. We are living in the night. Are we living as the light?

...for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Romans 13:11b

All of time serves our salvation. What a great comfort for the child of God! Even though we are living in the night, with sin and darkness all around, we know that the day is at hand. Our Lord is coming. Coming soon! Every joy and every sorrow, every pain and every pleasure, and every circumstance of life in which God places us is hastening us toward the second coming of Christ. What a day that will be! Our Lord Jesus returning in great power and glory on the clouds of heaven. He, who is the Light, will illuminate the darkness and bring the time of no more night for His people. What joy for the children of God!

As we continue to journey with our children toward heaven—encouraging and admonishing each other along the way—may our prayers be likened to that of our Lord in His high-priestly prayer, praying not that God take us out of the world, but that we not be led into the darkness and temptations of the evils that abound within. Wake up! Stay awake! *The night is far spent, the day is at hand.* Walk as children of the light. Watch for *the day*. Wait for *the day*. And pray that *the day* come quickly.



Strength of youth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois

Watch your mouth! (5)

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2022, p. 187.

We have been considering the subject of Christian communication, and so far we have noted two important principles. First, our communication must be governed by the principle of truth; second, our communication must be governed by the principle of what is necessary, important, and helpful. Or, to use the illustration we

have employed before, our words must pass through the *truth-filter* and the *necessity-filter*.

In this article we add to those two filters a third: the *love-filter*. All our communication must be governed by love.

A key passage of God’s Word that explicitly teaches

this principle is Ephesians 4:15: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” This passage is directed to members of the church and exhorts them in dealing with fellow saints to speak the truth in love.

To love another means that we view that person as dear, precious, and delightful. It means that we desire to do good to that person and not evil, and that in doing good to that person we are ready to give of ourselves for him. True love is also unconditional, not based upon the worthiness of the object of our love.

If our communication is characterized by love, then it will be evident in our words that we view the other person as dear, precious, and delightful. If our communication is characterized by love, then it will be plain from how we communicate that we mean to do good to that person and not evil. If our communication is characterized by love, then the manner of our speech is not conditioned upon the other person first being kind to us.

To help in understanding the meaning and implications of loving communication, consider the following six things:

1. The principle of love governs the *contents* of our communication.

Hateful speech is filled with the blaspheming of God’s name and curse words, with sexual innuendo and dirty talk.

Hateful speech cuts another person to ribbons, bullies, and seeks to destroy another. It is speech that is abusive and murderous, that severely wounds another person emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, leaving them feeling as worthless as a piece of garbage.

Hateful speech lays bare what ought to be kept private, dredges up sins of the past in order to run another person down.

Hateful speech mocks, humiliates, shames, and needlessly ridicules another.

In contrast, loving speech means that “no corrupt communication proceed[s] out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). Loving speech means that we “put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col. 3:8). Loving speech is “alway with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6).

The calling to speak loving words does not mean that we only ever say what other people want to hear. Flattery and men-pleasing is to be condemned just as much as hateful speech. Love for another person may require us to point out his sins, call him to repentance,

and expose the false teaching he holds or the ungodly way of life he is promoting. In love we may have to speak words that are not popular, words that others do not want to hear.

2. The principle of love governs the *manner* of our communication.

Love dictates that not only the actual words we speak be true and proper, but also that the way in which we speak them convey our love for the other.

Some trivialize this aspect of communication. They say that such things as tone, attitude, and manner are unimportant. For example, some might adopt the attitude, “So long as I am saying what’s true and defending the truth, then it doesn’t matter how I say it. The ends justify the means.”

This is a falsehood. Sin is sin, no matter how vigorously it is defended. It is essential that we say what is true and defend the truth, but it is also important how we do so. *How* we say things is as important as *what* we say. The *manner* is as important as the content *matter*. Remember what Proverbs says about the manner of our speaking: “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (15:1).

We ought not to conclude from this that all passion in communication is out of place. We ought to be passionate in how we speak about important matters, such as the truth of God’s Word. There is a place for righteous indignation and deep emotion.

But always we ought to be concerned that the tone in which we say something or the manner in which we write something gives clear evidence of proper concern for the other. We desire to communicate in such a way that the other person may hear what we want them to hear.

3. The principle of love governs the *motives* of our communication.

At all times we must guard our hearts and examine our motives, and that includes when we communicate. Very easily we speak out of impure motives. It is possible even to say things that are true and to do so in a proper manner but to do so from sinful motives. Our speech may be motivated by pride and the thinking that we are better than others. Our speech may be motivated by jealousy, when we despise another for the good that they enjoy. Our speech may be motivated by hatred for another and a desire for revenge. Our speech may be motivated by bitterness. Our speech may be motivated by self-promotion and self-seeking. And on and on the list could go.

To communicate lovingly, our speech must proceed

from a heart that is characterized by love and by motives that are pure. Loving speech arises out of a sincere delight in and concern for another.

We all would do well to stop and consider the motives that stand behind the things we say: Why did I say that? Why did I write that? Out of love? Or from some sinful motive?

4. The principle of love governs the *judgments* we make of others.

An aspect of communication is making judgments regarding others and what they are seeking to convey in their communication to us.

We sin against the neighbor when we judge him uncharitably, when we take what he says in the worst possible light, when we put the worst possible spin on what he wrote, when we come to the worst possible conclusion about him. According to Lord's Day 43 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the ninth commandment requires that "I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard."

Love demands that we make charitable judgments about others. Unless we have sufficient evidence to the contrary, we take what they have said or written in the best possible light and come to the best possible conclusions.

5. The principle of love governs the *approach* we take when dealing with another.

It is unloving to talk about another's sins and shortcomings with other people without ever speaking to the individual himself. It is unloving to address a person through an anonymous note stuffed in his mailbox at church or through an online post using an unidentifiable screen-name. It is unloving to say something in writing that we would never dare say face to face.

Love governs the approach that we take in dealing with another. If I have an issue with something you have done or said, then I ought to talk to you about it rather than talking to dozens of others about my gripe. If I have an issue with something you have done or said, then I ought to address you openly and honestly, personally and (preferably) face to face. This allows you the opportunity to see my face, hear my tone of voice, and take in my body language, and it also allows you the opportunity to respond to me.

6. The principle of love governs the *line of argumentation* we take.

We do not show proper concern for another when in arguing a point with him we do so illogically. Specifically, we fail to communicate in love when we use

any number of logical fallacies. There are many, but I'll mention just a few of the more common.

- We do not lovingly communicate when we make an *ad hominem* argument, that is, when we attack someone's person (for example, their intellectual ability, height, or weight) in addition to or rather than their arguments.

- We do not lovingly communicate when we make a red herring argument, that is, when we make an issue of something that is irrelevant and distracting from the main issue (for example, when asked why his team is performing so poorly, the coach begins to complain about the referees).

- We do not lovingly communicate when we make a straw-man argument, that is, when we attack a point of view that a person does not actually hold (for example, you tell me that you enjoyed reading a certain book, and I respond that you must hate every other book and want them all burned so that people only may read your favorite book).

- We do not lovingly communicate when we make a slippery-slope argument, that is, when we assume without proof that someone's position will inevitably lead to some extreme result (for example, I tell you that, because you broke up with your girlfriend, you will never be married).

- We do not lovingly communicate when we make a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument, that is, we wrongly argue that because B followed A that A caused B (for example, the rooster crows [A] and then the sun rises [B]).

Logic is a reflection of who God is as a God of order, and without logic communication and life on earth would be impossible. Love is a spiritual concept and involves more than logic, but loving communication is not less than logical communication. We show love for the neighbor when we deal with him fairly, that is, logically.

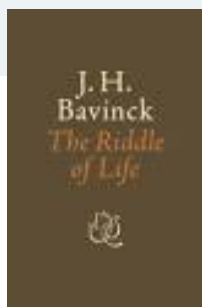
Love is an indispensable principle of our communication as Christians. Proof is that the Holy Spirit places it alongside of truth in the passage quoted above from Ephesians 4. As important as it is that we speak the truth, equally important is that we do so in love. As wicked as it is to speak the lie, it is equally as wicked to speak in sinful hatred.

Speak the truth!

In love!

Note: Now that Rev. Engelsma has taken on his role as an editor, this article concludes his writing for "Strength of Youth." We thank him for his profitable contributions for this rubric.

Bring the books...



The Riddle of Life, by Johan H. Bavinck. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016. 102 pages. \$21.50, softcover. [Reviewed by Dr. Marco Barone]

This book was written by Johan Herman Bavinck (1895—1964), whose uncle was Herman Bavinck. The book can be described as a general introduction to the Christian worldview. It is neither an exegetical work nor a theological monograph. The book is rather a discussion of vital philosophical questions answered from a Christian perspective. In eighteen short chapters, Bavinck seeks briefly but pointedly to discuss metaphysics (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge), ethics (the nature of the good and evil), aesthetics (the nature of beauty), and even a little bit of logic (the structure of right reasoning) from a Christian point of view.

Bavinck invites the reader to marvel and awaken himself to wonder at the following: That we and anything else at all exist (chapter 1); that knowledge is achievable (chapter 2); that knowing the world outside of ourselves is possible (chapter 3); that creation is undeniably harmonically ordered (chapter 4); that all men (even unbelievers) nourish in their heart a sense that there is something else beyond this life (chapter 5); that all men long for unity (chapter 6) and meaning (chapter 7); that God works through the evil in the world (chapter 8); how easily and tragically money (chapter 9), honor (chapter 10), and earthly pleasure (chapter 11) deceive us with false promises; the tragedy of sin and humanity's dreadful blindness to it (chapter 12); humanity's misplaced cries for deliverance and the saints' godly cry to God and their eternal benefits of referring all things to God (chapter 13); the uniqueness of Jesus Christ (chapter 14), the man-God (chapter 15); faith in Him as the only escape from life's miseries (chapter 16); the world's illusory view of "progress" over against the hope of the gospel (chapter 17); death as the gate that leads the believer to the ineffable glory of belonging eternally to Jesus Christ (chapter 18).

These are all things that we often take for granted or hardly notice, but that in fact should leave us either in joyful awe or in trembling astonishment! The following is an example of the author's point from chapter 15:

Jesus is capable of reducing a person to nothing, till her soul is shattered, but he also can grab this same person, while crying for help, and embrace her with

his unimaginable love.... We can spend much time thinking about God, make all sorts of images and ideas regarding him, but when we find ourselves in the tightest spot ever, or when we start to discover what life really is all about, then it suddenly dawns on us: now I know how I must visualize God because he comes to us as Jesus. In the moments when life presents itself in its truest form, we need only look to the true God, the one we can see with our own eyes, the one whom we know when we look straight at Jesus (75).

The book is an exercise in godly philosophy, where "philosophy" is treated as the first Christian apologists intended it: a biblically grounded doctrine that leads to pious practice. This little volume contains very insightful remarks about ethical issues such as pride and humility, the abuse of technology and science, service and self-centeredness, childlike faith over against complaint, the purposely ordered life according to God's law over against the desire of autonomy. These are all very relevant issues today, where proper order and decency are questioned, not only in society, but also in some sections of the church-world.

The following is an example from chapter 10, where Bavinck contrasts the self-seeking and proud individual to the selfless and service-centered man.

There are at times also those who make wild accusations without any basis whatsoever, thereby deeply hurting people's feelings and causing all sorts of commotion, which only earns them the label of fools and good-for-nothing. When this backfires on them, such people often blame the world at large because they fail to recognize that those who harm someone's good name are well on the way of trampling on their own happiness (47-48).

It is a book that, like all other books, needs to be read with discernment. For example, carefulness needs to be exercised with regard to the unclear references to the theory of evolution, and where Bavinck wrongly ascribes the title of "God's children" to all humanity in general (chap. 6). That said, Bavinck leads the reader's mind into a brief intellectual journey to a deep and heart-searching understanding of both the misery of fallen humanity and of the amazing redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ. This volume will help the university or seminary student and the thoughtful reader perceive the reasonableness and the beauty of all things, continually seeing them by faith in the light of the truth of the triune God through Jesus.

Report of Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on March 2-3, 2022, in Hope PRC (Redlands, CA). This isolated congregation did an outstanding job of hosting the delegates.

The day before the meeting, an officebearers' conference was held on the timely subject of the church of Christ. The first two speeches dealt with the government of the church, with Rev. M. Kortus speaking on "A Delicate Balance: The Relationship between Office of Believer and the Special Offices in the Church of Christ" and Rev. E. Guichelaar speaking on "The Autonomy of the Local Congregation and the Authority of the Broader Assemblies." The two other speeches dealt with a proper view of the church's sinfulness, with Rev. R. Hanko speaking on "A Proper View of the Church—Mother or Whore?" and Rev. J. Langerak speaking on "The Church's Self-Reflective Response to Chastening." Between the last two speeches the male chorus of Hope congregation sang several beautiful numbers. A very enjoyable day of instruction and fellowship was had by all!

The following day, Classis began with opening devotions led by the chairman of the previous meeting, Rev. E. Guichelaar. After Classis was legally constituted, Rev. S. Key assumed the chair.

Routine reports of the stated clerk, classical committee, and reading sermon committee were read and approved. The church visitors also reported on their work over the last year and the presence of unity, peace, and love prevailing in the churches in spite of the hardships of the last year.

After recessing for the committees of pre-advice to prepare advice, Classis addressed matters brought from First PRC Edmonton relating to Rev. J. Marcus. Classis concurred with the decision of First Edmonton to approve Rev. Marcus' request to remain eligible for a call in our churches, concurred with the decision of First Edmonton to approve Rev. Marcus' request for partial support for the next year, and concurred with the decision of First Edmonton to grant Rev. Marcus' request to transfer his credentials to Grace PRC where he is currently a member.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply for the vacant congregations of Doon (IA) PRC, First PRC Edmonton, and Peace PRC (Dyer, IN). Due to the number of vacancies in Classis West, it was decided to ask Classis East for assistance in providing three 2-week classical appointments to Edmonton for the months of June through October.

Classis had before it a protest of decisions taken at the last meeting of Classis regarding not seating delegates from the former consistory of First PRC Edmonton and regarding the approval of the work of the church visitors with respect to First PRC Edmonton. Classis did not sustain the protest.

Having met until about 8:00 P.M. on Wednesday, Classis decided to recess until the following morning to give several committees of pre-advice time to work.

The next day, Thursday, March 3, Classis met at length, not finishing its work until 9:30 P.M.

Classis treated in closed session an appeal of the discipline work of a consistory. After lengthy, careful deliberation, Classis did not sustain the appeal.

Classis also treated in closed session another appeal of the discipline work of a different consistory. After lengthy, careful deliberation, Classis did not sustain the appeal.

Classis approved the subsidy requests for 2023 for three churches and forwarded them on to synod for its approval.

Classis also voted for various classical functionaries. Rev. A. Brummel was re-appointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Rev. J. Engelsma was appointed to a three-year term as a *primus* synodical deputy, Rev. E. Guichelaar was re-appointed to a three-year term as a *secundus* synodical deputy, and Rev. M. De Boer was appointed to a one-year term as a *secundus* synodical deputy. Classis appointed Revs. A. Brummel, R. Hanko, S. Key, and J. Laning as church visitors, with Revs. H. Bleyenbergh and J. Engelsma as alternates.

Ministers delegated to Synod 2022 were Revs. R. Barnhill, A. Brummel, J. Engelsma, S. Key, and J. Laning. Alternates are Revs. H. Bleyenbergh, E. Guichelaar, M. Kortus, J. Langerak, and S. Regnerus. Elders delegated to Synod 2022 were Keith Bruinsma (Peace), Loren Gritters (Hull), Chester Hunter, Jr. (Edgerton), Peter Smit (Hope), and Phil E. Van Baren (Crete). Alternates are Robert Brands (Loveland), Luke Griess (Loveland), David Poortinga (Loveland), Keith Van Drunen (Crete), and Ryan Van Overloop (Crete).

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$17,926.18.

Classis will meet next in Doon PRC on September 28, 2022, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma
Stated Clerk, Classis West



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which PRC minister recently led two different congregational Prayer Day services on back-to-back days?

PRC news (denominational)

Now that I kept you all in suspense with my question about whom **First PRC-Edmonton** called on February 27, we can confirm that it was Rev. E. Guichelaar. My apologies for an obvious copy editor's mistake! It was supposed to be filled in by yours truly before it went to press. I can guess you had a little laugh at my expense. Probably not the last time that will happen.

On March 13 **Rev. C. Spronk** (Faith PRC) declined the call to Grace PRC.

On March 9 Peace PRC issued a call to Rev. E. Guichelaar.

March 20 was the date **Rev. R. Barnhill** was installed as the third pastor in Heritage PRC's history. Rev. S. Key led that special service.

Special notice for Future Teachers and Ministers: Information for the 2022 PR Scholarship Fund essay competition is now available. Please email prcscholarship@gmail.com to receive the essay topics and submission requirements. Completed essays must be submitted by May 31.

PRC news (congregational)

Doon PRC (IA): Her building addition is coming along nicely. In an early March bulletin this note was published:



"The construction project has now advanced to the point that we are able

to enter through the new doors! The ushers will again usher from the back of the sanctuary. The new bathrooms are not yet ready."



Grandville PRC (MI): The congregation enjoyed (and will enjoy!) two special music events. On March 20, the Activities Committee invited the members to a hymn sing following the evening service, which includ-

ed both congregational singing and some special numbers. And, coming up on April 17, the Sunday School children will present a special Easter program after the morning service.

Trinity PRC (Hudsonville, MI): Her Activities Committee planned a Gym Jamboree for Saturday evening, March 12, at nearby Hudsonville Christian School. Not sure what that all involved, but it sounds like it could get rather wild and crazy. Let's hope there were no serious injuries.

Unity PRC (Byron Center, MI): In a recent bulletin it was reported that the members needed to be patient a little longer as they endured colder temperatures in the gym of Zion Christian School, which they are using while they wait to build their own church. Apparently, the new furnaces had arrived but some further construction needed to be done before they could be installed. Perhaps the good news is that the worst of the Michigan winter is over and spring has arrived—with warmer temperatures.

Young people/young adult activities

On Sunday, March 13, at Georgetown PRC the **Young Calvinists** sponsored a presentation by Prof. R. Dykstra on "Making Confession of Faith." His talk addressed what public confession of faith includes, knowing whether one is ready, and why one must confess his/her faith in Christ Jesus. Time was also allotted for discussion. The presentation was intended to benefit those who have already made confession of faith as well as those who will do so in the future.

Back on February 28, the **Randolph PRC** young people held a Pizza Ranch fundraiser. I can taste the broasted chicken and dessert pizzas from here (Hudsonville has their own Pizza Ranch, you know)!

The **Crete PRC** young people have planned a gym night for Saturday April 30. I'm guessing that basketball and volleyball will be the dominant activities.

The **Peace PRC** Young People's Society are hosting a singspiration on Sunday evening, April 24. "Please join us as we glorify God in singing praises to Him."

Are you aware of the **Colorado Young Adults Retreat**? "Save the date for a retreat in Colorado Springs! Retreat will be held at Bear Trap Ranch on August 1-4

for ages post high to 30.” Registration opened on Monday, March 14, and the notice said, “spots are limited, so sign up early!” We hope you did—and will if you haven’t yet. That is always a very special event.

Advance notice! An Adult Singles’ Conference (ages 25+) is being planned for August 18-21, 2022. Rev. J. Marcus and Rev. M. McGeown have agreed to speak. You are asked to email prcsinglesconference@gmail.com or see the Facebook page for more details. Will you be there?

PR Christian school activities

Sioux Falls Protestant Reformed Christian School invited the members of Heritage PRC to attend a chapel service led by Rev. S. Key on Friday morning, March 18, at the church. Afterward, all were invited to the school for refreshments.

The covenant children of Adams Christian School presented their all-school program on Friday, March 25, at Friendship Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, MI.

PR Special Education held a special fundraiser on the evening of March 26 at the Grandville (MI) Middle School auditorium. The audience was treated to “an engaging

and informative presentation” by Mr. Glenn Kooima titled “For Lawrence: Lest We Forget.” Glenn is a member of Calvary PRC (Hull, IA) and this presentation is about the life of his uncle, WWII bomber pilot 1st Lt. Lawrence Kooima. A free will offering was taken to benefit the PR Special Education program, which is now throughout PR Christian schools.

And, in Lynden (WA), Covenant Christian School held its annual program on Thursday, March 31. A thrilling theme was developed: “Martin Luther: Warrior of the Faith.” “Through song, narration, and video,” the children told “the story of how God used this man to bring reformation to His church.” Truly, I wish I could have been there!

Trivia answer

Rev. Matt DeBoer led his own congregation’s Prayer Day service on Wednesday, March 9, in Edgerton, MN, then traveled to Sioux Falls, SD the next night (Thursday, March 10) to lead Heritage PRC’s service. Sometimes the churches in the West have to get creative in obtaining pulpit supply when they are vacant. We’re grateful Rev. DeBoer was willing to do this for them.

Announcements

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2022 at 8:00 A.M., in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 11, 2022.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. R. Kleyn

April 3—Joseph Resists the Advances of a Seductive Woman
Genesis 39:6-20

April 10—Joseph in Prison
Genesis 40

April 17—Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes
Luke 24:13-35

April 24—Joseph Remembered and Exalted
Genesis 41:1-40

PRC Synod 2022

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2022, are hereby notified that all material for this year’s synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Mr. Doug Mingerink
(dougi@mingerink.com)