

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

June 2022 • Volume 98 • No. 17

## The white horse

Rev. Dennis Lee

## The PRCA and the true/false church (5)

## Preview of Synod 2022

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

## The leaked draft of the Supreme Court majority opinion

## Synod 2022 of the CRC—Report on human sexuality

Rev. Audred Spriensma

## Immorality

Rev. Justin Smidstra



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](http://www.rfpa.org)

Website for PRC: [www.prca.org](http://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

- 387 The white horse  
Rev. Dennis Lee

### Editorial

- 389 The PRCA and the true/false church (5)  
391 Preview of Synod 2022  
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

### Editor's Note

- 393 Prof. Barrett Gritters

### Letters

- All around us  
398 The leaked draft of the Supreme Court majority opinion  
400 Synod 2022 of the CRC—Report on human sexuality

Rev. Audred Spriensma

### A word fitly spoken

- 401 Immortality  
Rev. Justin Smidstra

### Believing and confessing

- 402 Of Jesus Christ, true God and man,  
the only Savior of the world  
(Second Helvetic Confession, 11b)  
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

- 405 Report of Classis East  
Rev. Clayton Spronk

### News from our churches

- 406 Mr. Charles Terpstra



REFORMED  
FREE PUBLISHING  
ASSOCIATION



## Meditation

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

# The white horse

**And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.**

**Revelation 6:1-2**

Visions and symbols! The book of Revelation is filled with visions and symbols that reveal much-needed comforting truths for our times, which is the end times, and in a most profound, practical, and powerful way. For nothing is more comforting and reassuring for the child of God living through troubling times and events in the world, in the church, and in his own narrower sphere of life than the fact that it is not the devil, nor man, nor blind forces and fate, but his absolutely sovereign God in Christ his exalted Savior who is in total control over all the events and circumstances in his life! Do you not share this sentiment, dear reader?

In order to understand the symbolism of these verses, we need to consider them in light of the vision given to the aged apostle John on the isle of Patmos recorded in Revelation 4-7.

The scene in chapter 4 is the majestic throne room of God. In that throne room and before the one sitting on the throne, John sees 24 elders (representing the church in heaven) and 4 beasts (representing all of the creatures of the earth). Both the 24 elders and 4 beasts are engaged in perfect, devoted worship of God.

As chapter 5 begins, the focus shifts to the One sitting on the throne, and in particular, to the object that is in His right hand: a book sealed with seven seals and written on both front and back. This book symbolizes God's eternal counsel, and thus the loosing of it symbolizes the execution of His perfect plan. It is this book that is the connection between chapters 4 and 5. Opening it is the way for the lowly and despised church on earth with all her present fears and troubles to arrive at her exalted and perfect state in heaven through the return of her exalted Savior. Fittingly, He who has accomplished victory for us at Calvary is the only One worthy to open the book. It is He who executes God's

perfect plan and is in total control of all things in heaven and on earth! It is He who looses the seals of this book, beginning with this first seal.

### Its identity

This loosing of the first seal unleashes a white horse. This is the first of four horses unleashed with the loosing of the first four seals. These four horses symbolize the four basic elemental forces that are constantly at work in time and history, accounting for every event that comes to pass. It is the symbolism used by the Spirit to depict the first, the leading, and the most powerful force at work that brings about the return of our exalted Christ in judgment!

What does the symbolism portray? With the horse, the Bible commonly associates war (cf. Prov. 21:31) and strength in war and battle (cf. Ps. 20:7). So, the horse symbolizes strength and power in war. What about the rider? Some say the rider is the beast (that is, Antichrist). However, this does not harmonize with the fact that neither the rider nor the horse struggles against, but rather, willingly does the will of the Lamb. Others say that the rider is Christ. However, the Lamb has already been identified as Christ. And besides, if Christ is the rider of the white horse, *who* are the riders of the other horses? It is best to take the horses and riders *together* as powerful forces directed according to the book opened by the Lamb.

Accordingly, what we have is this: Christ the exalted Lamb sending out powerful forces symbolized by horses running throughout time and history to carry out God's purposes in an orderly fashion. That the white horse rides first is not insignificant. For while all four horses work together to bring about the swift return of Christ in judgment, the other three horses do so by serving the cause of the white horse and its rider.

So what does the white horse and its rider represent? The cleansing power of Christ through the gospel of His cross! We see that when we consider the symbolism of the color white. White is a color of purity. It therefore signifies spiritual purity, and in particular, the spiritual virtues of righteousness and

holiness. Isaiah 1:18 is one among the many Bible verses that demonstrates this: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD; though your sins be scarlet, they shall be *white* as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” In contrast to the dark colors of scarlet and crimson that signify sin, when the LORD graciously cleanses us we shall stand before Him “white as snow,” perfectly clean, pure, and spotless; perfectly righteous and holy!

This cleansing work of the white horse and its rider takes place in the way of spiritual warfare. The horse and also the bow of the rider, which is his weapon, both speak of war. This white horse and its rider are constantly fighting a great spiritual war that began long ago when God drew the line in the sand between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (cf. Gen. 3:15). The white horse fights and wars against Satan, tearing down his strongholds. Everywhere and throughout time and history we see the all-conquering effects of this horse: the elect of God held captive by the power of sin are freed by the gospel power of the cross! And being so graciously freed by God through such an awesome, almighty, all-conquering power, they live holy, loving, thankful lives empowered by His Spirit and Word. They therefore cannot help but give witness of their great salvation and gospel to others. It is in this way that this white horse, empowered by the almighty and invincible power of God in and through Christ, continues running its course on earth through time and history!

### **Its victorious running**

As the white horse does so, it fights, conquers, and is *always* triumphant! Whenever and wherever this white horse is sovereignly unleashed by Jesus, it subdues His foes and frees the chosen, undeserved captive people of God! It runs victoriously throughout time and history!

This victorious running is set forth at the end of verse 2: “And he that sat on him had a bow, and a *crown* was given unto him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer.” For the crown here is not a king’s crown, but the crown of a *victor* at the end of a race or contest. Notably, this white horse and its rider was already crowned victorious by the sovereign God *before* it set out on its running. Is that not such a comforting and reassuring word for all of us who love Christ’s church among us and see her in her present troubles and great needs?

Christ is in total control! And the white horse continues its victorious running—through the preaching and witness of the gospel of Christ—in our own small circle of churches, our sister-churches, our mission fields, and far beyond us in every faithful church and mission circle

on earth—including all His elect in war-torn countries and wherever persecution is experienced!

This victorious running is seen in two ways.

First, the white horse continues to run through all times! It is unstoppable! Great and powerful kingdoms and nations, many of which have been and continue to be hostile towards the gospel of Jesus Christ, have come and gone; but the church on earth, the elect remnant of God with her gospel word, continues to abide. The gospel word continues to spread throughout the globe—even through war and persecution! The running of the white horse is unstoppable and therefore victorious!

Second, the white horse is victorious even when the preaching and witness of the gospel yield negative results: when people who hear it reject it, condemn it, and live in rebellion against Christ and His Word. For it is not the faithful preacher and the believer, but the exalted Christ Himself who governs the results of the faithful preaching and witness of the gospel. For the inspired apostle Paul describes faithful preachers as “a sweet savor of Christ,” portraying the sweet word brought by them in a twofold way: a “savor of life unto life” to some and “a savor of death unto death” to others (cf. II Cor. 2:15-16).

And so, we say together with the inspired apostle, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (cf. II Cor. 2:17). The gospel word softens, but also hardens! It brings life and strengthens true life and love to some; but it also brings death, and causes deeper hatred and rebellion against God and His people. It never fails to do so! For the Word of God always accomplishes the sovereign purposes of God! It never returns to Him void (cf. Is. 55:11).

In this twofold way, the running of the white horse is always triumphant, always victorious! And it will continue fighting, conquering, and tearing down every stronghold of Satan decreed in God’s eternal counsel—till every last one of God’s captive children are brought into the kingdom of light from the kingdom of darkness, and the cup of iniquity filled to the brim—through the rejection of the gospel of the white horse; through the strife, division and war of the red horse; through the economic struggles and greed of mankind of the black horse; and finally through the pale horse of death. And then, Christ shall return in judgment!

What tremendous comfort and assurance for us! What a precious gospel we have!

### **Our thankful response**

What ought to be the response of all those who receive this gospel of the white horse and its wonderful, life-giving and life-strengthening effects? May it be a humble response of thankfulness!

May this thankful response be made manifest by

preachers being bold and faithful in their preaching and teaching of the Word! May this thankful response also be made manifest by a proper reception of the preaching, by a joyful living and generous giving in support of the gospel, and last but not least, by an active and zeal-

ous witness of that very same gospel word received—in all of our conduct and speech—among ourselves, our children, and all who are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call (cf. Acts 2:39)!



## Editorial

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

# The PRCA and the true/false church (5)

The first three editorials in this series spelled out the biblical and Reformed view of the distinction between the true church and the false church. The previous (fourth) editorial began making some application of the distinction to the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA). Specifically, that editorial made the case (humbly, I pray) that the PRCA are true, faithful churches where Christ is present. At the close of that editorial I indicated that I wanted to give two warnings to the denomination. I take up those warnings here, in this concluding article in the series.

### Warning #1: Guarding against a wrong view of other churches

The first warning that I believe must be heard in the PRCA has to do with how we apply the true/false church distinction to other churches and denominations, how we view them, how we speak about them, and how we treat them.

Have we as churches and individuals tended to think that the PRCA are the only true churches and that all others are false? Rather than being humbly grateful for the heritage that is ours, have we tended to look down our noses in pride at other churches and Christians?

There is evidence to suggest that we have been guilty of this.

In the early 1960s, a matter was brought before Classis West of the PRCA and also synod. Among other things, the documents stated that the PRCA is the true church and all other churches are false.

In the early 1980s, David Engelsma wrote that some have viewed Article 29 of the Belgic Confession to mean that “one particular institute is the only true church, while all the others are the false church.” He then said, “Such an interpretation of the article has been given

by certain Reformed in the Netherlands; and, now and again, voices have been heard in the Protestant Reformed Churches expressing this position.”<sup>1</sup>

At times Protestant Reformed writers have spoken of the denomination as the “purest manifestation” of the true church on the earth. For example, Herman Hoeksema wrote, “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.”<sup>2</sup> In another place he spoke similarly, “Hence, rather than claiming that we as Protestant Reformed Churches are the only true church in the world, while all others are false churches, we would claim that we are the purest manifestation of the body of Christ in the world, and that it is our duty to join ourselves to it.”<sup>3</sup>

From a certain point of view, that language is understandable. Does not the conscientious believer join a church because he views that church to be evidencing the marks of a true church more faithfully than any other churches he is aware of? But, from another point of view, the language of “purest manifestation” can be easily misconstrued. Is it possible that, having that language ingrained in our minds from youth, we have become puffed up in pride at how we are the purest of all churches in the world? Have we been careless in how we spoke of other denominations, failing to apply properly the true/false distinction?

1 David Engelsma, “The Marks of the False Church,” *Standard Bearer* 58, no. 11 (March 1, 1982), 257.

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

3 Herman Hoeksema, “Notes on the Belgic Confession,” 36. This is a syllabus printed by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



Not only has this been the case in our view of those outside the denomination, but some have been guilty of a wrong spirit in how they have viewed others *within* the denomination. Has it not happened that members of one congregation look down on members of another congregation across town as not being “conservative” enough or “PR” enough?

We also ought to examine honestly the way in which we have engaged in polemics against other believers and churches. Have we always fairly represented the positions of those we are critiquing? While raising objections to their teachings, have we treated other Christians with the respect we would want them to show us? Have we been prone to attack and belittle men instead of sticking to the issues? And have we been more prone to point out proudly the weaknesses of others than to examine ourselves?

This wrong spirit has shown itself at times in some members practicing the shunning of other Christians. By this I do not refer to the biblical injunction “not to keep company” (I Cor. 5:11) with one excommunicated by the church for impenitence so that “he may be ashamed” (II Thess. 3:14). But I refer to the practice of some who have refused to have anything to do with family members that belong to other Reformed churches and live godly lives, or have refused to have anything to do with family members who belong to the PRCA because those family members have fellowship with others who do not belong to the denomination.

Throughout much of our history, those outside our denomination have ascribed to us the teaching: “Protestant Reformed people are the only ones saved.” We have vehemently rejected this as false. But have our language and conduct given people reason to doubt whether we reject that position? Have we contributed to some believing this is our position?

Now in the last year a group has departed from the PRCA, and they have taken to referring to the denomination as “false,” “whore,” and “Babylon.” They have used some of the vilest language to describe the denomination and her officebearers. While as churches we stand aghast at their bitter invectives, we ought to consider: Are we as churches responsible for this kind of behavior? Did they learn to act and speak this way from the PRCA? Are we receiving on our own heads what we have heaped on the heads of other denominations? Are we reaping what we have sown in them?

God has been chastening us as a denomination over the last years. Errors and weaknesses have been exposed in our midst. We have come to see that there are problems not only in other denominations but in our own midst. The fruit of this ought to be our being

humbled, so that we walk in humility with one another in the church and in humility as a denomination with respect to other denominations.

No, such humility does not mean that we are ready to compromise on our convictions. Humility does not mean that we no longer engage in polemics and defend the truth over against the false teachings of those outside our denominational walls. It does not mean that we do not warn those who want to leave for another denomination about the errors we believe are found there. Meekness is not weakness.

However, humility ought to characterize the *manner* in which we set forth the truth and engage in polemics. There are believing Christians with whom we can disagree theologically but still view as brethren. We must guard against a wrong, overly-critical, fault-finding attitude, and we must certainly refuse to deal with others in a proud, holier-than-thou spirit.

Have we learned this lesson as churches in this controversy? Beloved brothers and sisters, let us be on guard against a wrong view of other churches!

## **Warning #2: Guarding lest we apostatize**

With respect to the true/false church distinction, the second warning that I believe must be heard is that we must guard against apostatizing and becoming a false church.

As I have indicated in the previous editorial, any reasonable evaluator of the PRCA must conclude that they are true churches in which Christ is present. But though not apostatizing or apostate churches, we must be on guard that such a departure not happen.

This warning always needs to be heard by the church on earth because apostasy is always a danger for her. While the catholic, spiritual body of Jesus Christ can never go lost, it is certainly true that individual, local church institutes can depart and be lost.

The Scriptures give a number of indications of the threat of apostasy to the church. The apostle Paul had established the churches in the region of Galatia on his missionary journeys, grounding them in the truth of the gospel. But later he says to them, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal. 1:6). Having labored for considerable time in Ephesus to build up the church there, the apostle spoke warmly of their faithfulness: “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15-16). But, several years later, the apostle John wrote to this same church: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4).

The history of the New Testament church is replete with examples of faithful churches apostatizing. What happened to the churches of Luther in Germany? What happened to the churches of Calvin in Switzerland and France? What happened to the churches of Knox in Scotland? What happened to the churches of Gomarus and Bogerman and of De Cock and Van Velzen in the Netherlands? They are almost entirely gone, as Europe has become in many respects a spiritual wasteland.

What happened to our mother church, the Christian Reformed Church? She has departed so far, that her battle now is to try to stem the floodwaters of homosexuality and transgenderism in her midst.

Apostasy is always a real and present danger for the church on earth. It is a real and present danger for the PRCA.

Not only do we need to be warned in a general way against apostasy, but we need to be warned specifically against apostatizing by a promotion of a wrong view of good works in relation to salvation.

There are several reasons why I believe the threat that we especially need to be on guard against is *legalism*. First, this has perennially been the threat to the church. A simple overview of church history will reveal that, not only was legalism the issue at the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation, but it was the great issue that the church always faced. This remains the great danger for true churches today.

Second, I believe we need to be on guard against a subtle form of legalism in light of the recent controversy in our churches. The errors that our assemblies have rejected in the last years gave to the believer's good works a place and function that are not in harmony with our confessional standards. We have seen that, as churches who delight to proclaim the unconditional nature of the covenant and justification by faith alone, we are not immune to false teachings that compromise these cardinal truths.

Third, I believe we need to be warned against apostatizing in the direction of legalism in light of the doctrinal errors of those who have recently left the denomination. The leaders of those who left us are advocating positions that come dangerously close to antinomianism (if they are not actual antinomian positions). In light of that, some might judge, "We need to warn against antinomianism!" We certainly need to be warned against sliding off into the error of antinomianism. While antinomianism was never the issue coming before our ecclesiastical assemblies in the last years, careful observers of the denomination have seen evidences of this error in our churches. This means we need to understand salvation by grace, including the work of Christ by His Spirit in and through us, and the proper place of the law in the life of the regenerated Christian. That being said, there is a danger that we overreact to those errors and exert all our efforts to combat antinomianism, while failing to be on guard against the threat of legalism. While our attention is fixed on the one error, the other error may well slip in through the back door.

We must learn and take to heart the lessons that God has taught us through our controversy. Prior to the controversy, was it the case that we proudly thought we knew our doctrine, when in reality we had a woeful lack of interest in theological subjects? Was it the case that a lukewarm spirit had settled upon us? Did we lose our zeal for our precious heritage? To guard against apostasy, we must search the Scriptures and Reformed confessions anew, coming to a renewed understanding and appreciation of them, and being ready to try the spirits in light of them.

To be Reformed is to be always reforming. Beloved brothers and sisters, may we be ever reforming and ever on guard against apostasy!

And let us understand and appreciate the true/false distinction, and apply it carefully—both to ourselves and to others.

## Preview of Synod 2022

The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRCA) will be hosted this year by Zion PRC (Jenison, MI). A pre-synodical worship service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, and the assembly will convene to begin its work on Tuesday, June 14, at 8:00 A.M.

In comparison to recent years, the agenda is considerably lighter, at a little over 100 pages. While the agenda is not as lengthy, the material before the synod is still important work.

Two overtures will require synod's careful consideration. One overture is the request of a consistory

to change Church Order Article 67 so that no longer would the churches be required to hold worship services on Old and New Year's days.

The second overture is the request of an individual regarding a doctrinal statement authored by a special committee of Classis East in January of 2018. Synod 2018 pointed out errors in that statement. The individual bringing the overture asks that the authors be required to explain in writing their doctrinal position regarding the doctrinal statement, give a response to the judgments that Synod 2018 made regarding it, and

include their theological convictions regarding the relation between obedience and the experience of covenant fellowship with God.

In addition to the two overtures, there is one protest on the agenda. An individual objects to decisions made at last year's synod in the case of a former minister in the denomination who was deposed from the ministry for sins of slander and schism.

In addition to these three matters, the agenda contains the regular reports from the synodical standing committees who labor in the interim between meetings as servants of synod.

The committee appointed to plan the 100th anniversary of our denomination is recommending that a weeklong celebration be held from June 23-27, 2025, at Calvin University. The suggested theme is "Grace: the PRCA at 100." Start to make plans to attend this significant event.

The Catechism Book Committee reports that it is working on minor modifications to the Bible History curriculum, with plans to bring formal recommendations next year.

The Contact Committee (CC) reports on the interactions with sister churches and other contacts in the past year. After being unable for a time to make visits due to the pandemic, they report on visits to our sister churches in Northern Ireland and Singapore. The CC is proposing to synod the adoption of a policy whereby members from our sister church in Singapore could make appeal to our denomination for judgment regarding grievances they have in their own congregation. This is due to the congregation being alone in that country without other churches in a denomination to seek advice from. The CC also reports that its delegation to NAPARC was not given opportunity to make a presentation on the Federal Vision since they were observers at this gathering and not members. Because making such a presentation does not appear to be a possibility going forward, the CC indicates that it will not be recommending the sending of visitors to NAPARC in the coming year.

The Inter-Denominational Psalter Review Committee did not have the final version of the Psalter ready for the publication of the agenda, but is still hoping to be finished with its work and able to present a final version for synod.

At the same time, the Protestant Reformed Psalter Review Committee reports that it has been busy going over the proposed changes to the Psalter and corresponding with the inter-denominational committee. Our own committee hopes to present its recommendation to Synod 2023. It seems that next year's synod will

be the one to deal with how to move forward with the Psalter in our churches.

The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) reports that Zion PRC has agreed to serve as the new calling church for a home missionary. The DMC and Zion's Council are working in tandem to chart a path forward for our work in domestic missions. The DMC also reports that work is being done to revamp the denominational website, in part for its enhanced use in evangelism and missions.

The Emeritus Committee indicates that the retired ministers and wives are being cared for, and recommends a small increase of the yearly "no-questions-asked" amount from \$25,000 to \$26,000.

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) reports on the reduction of our three foreign missionaries down to two with Rev. D. Holstege's taking a call to pastor one of our local congregations. The calling church (Doon PRC) and the FMC have suspended the calling of a third missionary to replace Rev. D. Holstege for the time being as they evaluate the needs of the field. After a lengthy period when our missionaries were hindered from taking furloughs due to covid restrictions, the FMC reports that our two missionaries are both planning furloughs for this summer. This will provide a much-needed time of refreshment for them.

The synodical deputies from Classis West report on their concurrence with the decision of Classis East in the deposition of a minister for the sin of sexual abuse. The Board of Trustees reports that it has found a capable man (Doug Mingerink, Sr.) to serve as synodical stated clerk in the place of this former minister.

The Theological School Committee (TSC) reports that it has encouraged our professors to offer "night classes" for interested individuals. This summer Prof. D. Kuiper plans to teach the early history of our denomination. The TSC recommends admitting a young man to the seminary in the fall. Synod will spend parts of the first few days examining Marcus Wee, senior seminarian from Singapore. Graduation for Sem. Wee and for Isaac Peters, a three-year student from Australia, is planned for Thursday night, June 16.

If you are in the area, do stop in to observe the examination of the student or any of the other sessions of our broadest assembly. And please remember the delegates in your prayers.



## Editor's note

The special issue on sexual abuse (May 1, 2022) was read by many. So much that the RFPA made a special run of 750 additional copies to supply those who requested them. Churches and individuals, both of our regular readership and those who do not subscribe to the magazine, asked for copies. There is a limited supply still available. Please write the editorial office ([gritters@prca.org](mailto:gritters@prca.org)) or the RFPA ([alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org](mailto:alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org)).

The articles hit home, in a most literal sense. Sexual abuse victims exist in our homes, the homes of Protestant Reformed readers and our friends. Many of their oppressors have lived there, too. As we said in the May 1 issue, at God's behest we have begun to "dig a hole in the wall" (Ezek. 8) to see what evils are performed in the darkness. God promised Ezekiel that He would spare those who would "sigh and cry" over the uncovered filth. Our special issue was a beginning of the public cry.

Letters from readers magnify that cry. We print some of them in this issue. We heard from many more than those whose letters are printed here. A sincere thanks to everyone who responded. We heard from the abused.

We heard from their families. We received letters from their friends and protectors. We heard from pastors, both within and without the PRC, in North America and abroad. Thank you to all for taking the time to write when silence may have been easier. All the letters were signed by the authors. Some of them we publish without the writer's name, for obvious reasons.

There are also the families of those caught in the sin of sexual abuse. We hear their cries, too. Of sorrow. Of pain. Of shame. Of confusion. Of utter perplexity. The burden is so heavy; the adversity so painful; the way so crooked (Eccl. 7). God hears your cries, too.

I was stunned to read what I can only call a 'wonder-worked confession' from one of the readers who is very personally involved: "God is so gracious. I wish everyone could experience God's grace like we have, but without the depths of a valley. We truly can say, we are closer to God and closer to each other." Some day soon may that be the experience of the victims, as well as of *all* those who suffer from the agony of sexual abuse.

—BG

## Letters

### Responses to sexual abuse issue

Thank you from the depths of my heart for the special issue on sexual abuse in the *SB*. I wish I could say we literally fight over who gets the *SB* next more often in our home, but I have to admit that is not the case. But when this issue arrived, if the person whose hand it was in set it down for a moment, there was someone else waiting to snatch it up. It had a positive impact in our home. Seeing this in print in the *SB* shows in a large way that there are people out there listening, watching, helping, caring, loving, believing, trusting, and learning...the many layers of ugliness of sexual abuse. This is huge for victims! People are standing up on behalf of those who simply aren't able and saying that this abuse is not ok; it is hated and wretched in God's eyes and even in man's eyes. This brings so much healing! We let abusers among us know this is not going to be covered up. Hopefully, this helps abusers to see the ugliness and turn from the temptation. I thank all who were involved in making this issue happen! Those behind the scenes, never mentioned. The writers. The proofreaders. The dear victims/survivors and their hard-to-be-told experiences. Even the artist who drew the cover. That picture was so powerful, it made

me weep! I Corinthians 3:16-17, 23: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are! And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." We serve a mighty God. He is faithful!

*Name withheld*

Thank you for the recent special issue of the *Standard Bearer* on sexual abuse. It is obvious that a great deal of thought and care went into the organization and production of the issue, and we are grateful.

Sexual abuse is a difficult topic to address. It is grotesque. Evil. Heartbreaking. It is a subject we shrink away from, afraid to look at it directly lest we be somehow tainted by its ugliness. An issue completely dedicated to abuse is a hard issue to read; but, it is also a very necessary and timely issue, one that **MUST** be read by God's people.

Though our family has not been touched directly by sexual abuse, it has touched the life of one that we love as our own. By the grace of God, she too, is an "overcomer." We have learned so much from her and her family about abuse, but more importantly we have

witnessed and been amazed at their testimony of the sustaining power of God in their lives. Lives that were shattered by this great wickedness but have been rebuilt by the wonderous love of our Heavenly Father.

Upon reading the different articles, one quickly notices a recurring theme. This is a beginning. Much work must still be done. We have much to learn as a people, as churches. And so, be encouraged. Keep working. Keep writing. We must face this evil directly and root it out of our churches. God demands that of us. Our covenant children, young and old, must be protected. In so doing, we will receive blessings from the Lord!

*Name withheld*

I appreciate the work of the *Standard Bearer* in putting together a timely and much-needed issue on sexual abuse. I pray that your work will be an encouragement to all survivors and advocates. I'm writing in response to Rev. Key's meditation ("My refuge and my fortress") in the May 1 issue. While the meditation provides a good explanation of Psalm 91:1-4, I am concerned with the language that the author uses in regards to "victims" and their "victimhood." He writes,

How are we to respond to the carnage wrought by sin, and sometimes by the instruments of Satan? Some respond by embracing their victimhood. Their lives are tormented by the memories. But sometimes it seems easier just to be a victim, to wallow in it, to live in bitterness and hatred toward the perpetrator, than even to think that there is another way, a more healthy way to confront the demons of the memories.

I understand the overall message of the author: to point victims of abuse to "another way," which is Jesus Christ rather than remaining stagnant in bitterness.

However, I would advise a different approach to word choice in conveying this message to victims. They don't "embrace" their victimhood; it's forced upon them. It's never "just easier" to be a victim. It's one of the heaviest burdens that a child of God can bear. And yes, they'll probably have bitterness and hatred toward the perpetrator. Can we not empathize with this when so much has been violated?

While I understand that the author's intent is not malicious, I nevertheless bristle at this word choice because of the message that may be implied, even unintentionally, to the victim: "So what if you're a victim; stop playing the victim card; God gave you salvation, so get over it." It's a brutal message that translates the victim from the control of the abuser to the control of our expectations of a victim's behavior. This message isn't compatible with the Savior who "gently leads" and who patiently left the 99 to seek the one who was lost. It doesn't allow the victim to process their trauma, a

crucial process in order to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

For biblical support for processing trauma, look to the Psalms. The Psalms contain [the testimony of] saints who were betrayed, injured, and brought near to death. They were victims of enemies who tried to silence and destroy them, to wipe them utterly from the earth. They were saints who not only rejoiced in the God of their salvation but also cried out from the depths, begged God to no longer hide His face, railed against their enemies, and even wondered if God had forgotten to be kind. And they all came to a godly confession: Jesus Christ is a refuge and fortress. But in between the injury and the confession was a process in which the psalmist worked out his salvation in fear and trembling.

This is where we must meet the victims: in the depths. There is pain, grief, sorrow, anger, frustration, and even hate. It's the starting path of what might be a life-long journey. We do our victims no favors if we tell them to stop being a victim, get over it, move on. They don't need a kick to get them jump-started in order to meet the timetable of our demands and expectations, whether we directly state those expectations or imply them through word choice. Wiser is the man who patiently and gently comes alongside them and joins them in wailing out their song of grief.

*Trisha Haak*  
Grand Rapids, MI

I write to you for two reasons.

The first reason is to thank you for openly and publicly acknowledging the prevalence of sexual abuse within our PRC. Thank you for humbly speaking the truth in addressing our past failures to properly handle abusers and providing instruction on how we are commanded to rightly respond to sexual abusers. Thank you for your care for the entire denomination in providing a brief education on predatory behavior, equipping us to better protect our children. And thank you most of all for giving space for victims to speak. It is through the victims-survivors-overcomers and their families and loved ones that we learn about abuse, its effects, and the deceitful manipulation of the predators. Perhaps one thing that would have made this special issue and future issues of the *SB* have more impact is to include articles written by family and friends of those who have suffered from the subject that is being addressed. To acknowledge that we can learn not only from our beloved and respected pastors and professors, but from a mother or husband or wife whose loved one has been violated in body, mind, and soul by sexual abuse. Please don't take my opinion as criticism; it is not. I am grateful, so very grateful, that

the editors have not only seen a need, but have taken action to address the need publicly.

The second reason that I write is some concern with Rev. Key's meditation. Before I state my concerns, please know that I highly respect Rev. Key, and often choose to listen to his sermons on Sermonaudio. Please know that the concerns that I bring to you are not an attack on Rev. Key, but are my concerns with his article. I humbly acknowledge that my concerns may be a misunderstanding on my part.

First, the article left me confused as to whom Rev. Key was addressing. In his introduction, he gives the impression that his article is "for comfort and to assist in the restoration of spiritual peace to those having been thrown into turmoil." From that, I make the assumption that the intention of his article is to bring comfort for the spiritual peace of the men and women who have been violated and murdered by the abusive actions of another. I first read the article as a non-victim. I then reread the article as he intended, as if I were a victim. I humbly submit to you some of my concerns.

After briefly addressing the destruction sexual abuse causes to the victim, Rev. Key immediately addresses the victim's response. Reading as if I were a victim, the spiritual peace and balm I am in need of is first to hear how God responds to the violence done against me (Ps. 12:5; Micah 6:8; Ps. 94; Ps. 11:5; Is. 61). As a victim, the comfort and peace that I am in desperate need of is to know that God saw what was done to me and declares it evil. I need to hear that God is a God of truth and justice and mercy. I need to be told the truth; that the wicked murderous acts of my perpetrator made a mockery of God's covenant. I need to be assured that God's love for me does not deceive, manipulate, mock, threaten, coerce, intimidate, use, dishonor, hurt, violate, and destroy. I need to be told that God's love for me is peace; the exact opposite of what my perpetrator did to me.

Instead (again, reading as if I were a victim), what I read next caused me more confusion and guilt and shame. Is he accusing me of wallowing in my victimhood, of being bitter? Does this mean that I better not tell anyone? Does this mean that bringing my abuser to the civil and church authorities is bitterness? Does this mean that my flashbacks and panic attacks and shaking and weeping at what my body is involuntarily doing is bitterness? Does he understand the internal battle of love/hatred for my perpetrator? Does he understand my confusion about how I feel about my perpetrator; that he or she was first my friend/uncle/teacher, and that in some twisted and tormenting way I still do have that confused feeling of love for him/her, and yet at the same time cannot make sense of the betrayal of that deceit? Does he know how

much I do want to forgive my abuser? Does he understand my constant battle to love, and yet my experience and understanding of love was twisted and weaponized, so for me to love my abuser is confusing and tormenting? Does that mean that my struggle to understand that is bitterness? Is my anger of the murder done to me in fact bitterness? Are the people in my church judging my cries of pain as a bitter heart? Are people declaring my screams of agony in body, mind, and soul as bitterness? Are there really victims who live an easier life being a victim? I don't want to be a victim! I've never wanted to be a victim! Perhaps Rev. Key in this paragraph is addressing ungodly victims, but that doesn't help me and give me hope and spiritual peace.

In the next paragraph (reading as a non-victim) Rev. Key describes sexual assault as "to be made an object of a self-serving person's lust." I respectfully submit that that statement is not entirely accurate. The abuser is also, maybe even especially, driven by sinful desire for power and control, using deceit and manipulation.

Another concern is Rev. Key's phrase "damaged goods in the eyes of many." Reading as a non-victim, this phrase surprised me. Of the several sexual abuse victims that I personally know, I can honestly say that I have never viewed them as "damaged goods." Reading the phrase as a victim (as is his stated intention), is that how people view me? As damaged goods? Oh, the added shame this adds to me!

Finally (again, reading as a victim), the language and analogies of "loving embrace," "shadow of a companion fall on you," "very close to him," "bigger than you," "spending the night there," "cradles us in His arms," "holds us" was painfully 'triggering.' These analogies are beautiful truths of God meant for my comfort, but they were used against me by my abuser, and I cannot make sense of these two opposing truths; the truth of God, and the experience of my abuse. I have confusion and distress in these two opposing realities. If Rev. Key has listened to other victims, does he know how this language does not offer peace? Or am I the only victim who experiences 'triggers' when reading these physical analogies? I believe what Rev. Key wrote is true, but are they true for me (speaking as a victim who has not yet begun to overcome the trauma)? He states, "Not only does He care for us, but He protects us"—but He didn't! He didn't protect me, night after night. What does God's protection mean?

Reading as a victim, this article left me thinking either that perhaps the author, like many others in the church, have not had the opportunity to interact with and enter into the suffering of a sexual abuse victim; or that my fears are in fact reality: I am unlike all other victims, I am



strange, and all alone in regards to the devastation that my abuser's actions have caused; devastation that has life-long impacts. And now I'm afraid to seek help from anyone, because I fear I am all alone in my suffering.

Editors, again, please know that this is not an attack on Rev. Key. I only desire to share with you my concerns with how his article may have negatively affected victims, and how it has left me, a non-victim, with confusion. My purpose in writing is to encourage you to continue the difficult and ugly discussion of sexual abuse when and where you have opportunity, in all of its truth, shining the light and hope of the gospel over against the evil of this heinous sin that has infected and been kept hidden in the PRC for decades. Together you and I know and confess that there is hope in Christ for victims. But that hope, that truthful, beautiful hope, must come with and after a full understanding and acknowledgment of what abuse does to the body, mind, and soul of the victim. I am not so foolish to claim to know and understand it fully; I never will. I only hope to give you my perspective from my conversations with victims.

May God grant us all the boldness to speak the truth, the humility to listen and learn how this sin is uniquely devastating, the compassion in our response to the victim, and the wisdom in our response to the perpetrator. And in all of it, may God be glorified as we seek His Word to be our guide and source of truth.

With love in Christ,  
*Vicki Cnossen*  
Wayland, MI

I appreciate the desire of the magazine to educate those in the denomination concerning abuse.

It is not easy to be an abuse victim in the PRC denomination. The pressure for victims to be silent so that abusers, and even their families, can feel comfortable is great. It is also not easy to be a victim when your abuser was considered the godliest man in the congregation and was always an elder.

It was in my abuser's job description as an elder to protect God's people; however his actions were a far cry from protection. My abuser killed everyone of his victims. Not physically, because our hearts still beat; but spiritually and emotionally he murdered each one of us.

When I read Rev. Key's meditation and read words such as, "embracing their victimhood" and "easier to be a victim and wallow in bitterness," I felt immense sadness not only for victims of abuse but for those who support us.

I am thankful for the support of my loved ones as I travel "through the sea" for a time. For a husband who sees my brokenness and doesn't equate it with bitterness; who patiently and graciously stands by my side. For a mother and father who must not only support their

daughter, but also grieve for what has been lost. I could call them five times a day to tell them that I don't blame them; yet to no avail. The guilt at times overwhelms both. For a sister who has never presented to me a timetable of how long she thought my journey of grief should last or what it should look like. I will never cease to thank my Father for placing these specific people on my path.

Rev. Key stated that for some it is easier to choose to remain a victim and embrace that bitter state. I wonder then, would he think victims have always had choices? I would like to take him back to a moment in time. A time when there was a girl laying on the couch with an elder; a man whose hands were all over the child as she lay on the couch. Did I have the choice to get off that couch? The choice to tell my parents? For victims, this is where Rev. Key's statements and line of thinking lead us. One more hurdle is placed on our path of recovery, and it didn't come from our abuser. To assume victims embrace their victimhood, casts shadow and dims the light on our story of justice and redemption.

I don't sing anymore in church or at least I haven't for awhile. However, I listen and the words afford me a great amount of comfort. My favorite verse comes from Psalter #73, st. 5:

My heart had failed in fear and woe  
Unless in God I had believed,  
Assured that He would mercy show  
And that my life His grace should know,  
Nor was my hope deceived.

I listen to these words and the tears fall, but I listen with such hope. Hope in knowing that not only is everything going to be okay, but it has to be okay. It has to be okay because of who God is and everything He has promised me in His Word.

*Name withheld*

### Rev. Key's response

The letters received indicate clearly the pain suffered by those who have been abused. There is a reason the church must treat the sin of sexual abuse as sin against the sixth commandment (murder). We grieve, and pray for healing for those who have suffered and continue to suffer the effects of this trauma.

I regret using those two sentences referred to, seeing they have been understood by some to mean, "get over it, move on," or "a kick to get them jump-started in order to meet the timetable of our demands." The readers of the *Standard Bearer* must understand that there is never a getting over the memories of trauma, be it sexual assault or other traumatic events in our lives. There will always be a recurrence of memories, sometimes at moments that might make those memories as painful as



when the event occurred, memories that often will also unleash a flood of emotions and thoughts. But it is also easy in the face of trauma to get trapped in unhealthy thoughts—and I do mean trapped. So Satan would abuse us by keeping us from knowing and embracing the power of God’s grace in the face of trauma.

That speaks to the urgency of receiving spiritual counseling that would restore to us the strength of the gospel in addressing our brokenness. Which is to say, it is necessary for our spiritual welfare that we progress from victims to survivors in processing our trauma. Careful biblical counseling is often necessary to help see and embrace a healthy way of confronting what I referred to as “the demons of the memories,” and how the merciful work of our heavenly Father gives healing and perspective even to the trauma in our lives.

It was the intention of the *SB* in publishing the special issue on this difficult subject not only that we as churches grow in our understanding of and treatment of this sin of devastation, but also that those who have been the objects of abuse be encouraged to seek out the help necessary to overcome and to know themselves to be more than conquerors in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pastor Steven Key

## Response to Rachel Green Miller’s book review

The December 15, 2021 edition of the *Standard Bearer* carried a positive review of Rachel Green Miller’s book *Beyond Authority and Submission; Women and Men in Marriage, Church and Society*. On this recommendation, I purchased and eagerly read it.

Unfortunately, and surprisingly, the book is a study in how to remove all gender distinctions from the Bible—except for the biologically-undeniable fact that only women can give birth, and the scripturally-undeniable fact (for an author who attends a very conservative church) that only men can be formally in church leadership. While male headship and female submission in marriage are acknowledged, the book contains not a single explanation that I could find of what this headship and submission look like in practice (except a seemingly endless list of what it does *not* look like). The admission that only men can take formal church offices appears similarly arbitrary and contrary to the entire flow of the book. More specifically, while Miller denies what she considers faulty reasons for restricting church offices to men, she never once explains positively why God chose to create this restriction. One concludes Miller has no idea.

Regarding gender roles in marriage and general society, the book promotes or implies positions incompatible with Scripture, and which are far-reaching and almost all-encompassing when it comes to gender. Mas-

culinity and femininity supposedly have nothing to do with character but only with biological gender (“you are feminine because that is what God made you, and nothing can change that...[every man] is masculine, and always will be, because God made you a man,” p. 149). Apart from giving birth, there appears to be nothing unique in how a mother parents versus how a father parents, leaving the reader to think that, once the baby is born, the child is simply parented by two genderless ‘parents’ instead of a father and a mother. Who the main breadwinner ought to be in the family (and by implication, who stays at home more with the children as the “primary caregiver”) is left a matter of complete liberty with no guidance given.

With the exception of only men holding formal church office, the church appears to consist of similarly genderless believers.

Woefully lacking in a book that is supposed to be a *biblical* evaluation of “women and men in marriage, church and society” is any positive explanation of almost all the key biblical texts. Miller generally spends significant time explaining various things these Bible texts supposedly do *not* mean, but rarely explains what they actually *do* mean. I give only one example. Ephesians 5:21-22 does not mean that “wives owe their husbands obedience as if they were soldiers” (p. 27), but that wives are called to submit to their husbands “as unto the Lord” and “in every thing” is not acknowledged, much less explained positively. The husband’s role and duties in the immediately following verses are also strangely absent from the book. The one key passage where Miller does attempt to give an alternative positive explanation is God saying He would make Adam “a help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). Apparently, “help meet” is better translated “necessary ally” (p. 41). To Miller, Genesis 2:18 does not appear to indicate any role differences between men and women, but only teaches that men and women are “interdependent co-laborers” (p. 41).

As such, this book is not a warning against excesses in the “complementarian” movement, but an almost-complete capitulation to feminism and egalitarianism, and an attack on the beautiful complementarity of male and female presented in the Bible and in creation.

Manuel Kuhs  
Ballymena, NI

Dear Mr. Kuhs,

Thank you for your thoughts in what appears to be a review of your own. In response I can only offer a few portions of Miller’s conclusion here for other readers who may not own the book.

We have inherited a mixture of good and bad beliefs—particularly about men and women.... Much of what we

believe...is actually inherited from our Greco-Roman and Victorian ancestors. We have ended up with layers of biblical and extra-biblical beliefs that obscure...what the Bible actually teaches...the hyper focus on authority and submission has done considerable damage...this fixation on authority and submission...promotes antagonism and disunity.

Authority and submission are important aspects of our relationships, but they shouldn't be the lens through which we view all of life.... By moving beyond an exclusive focus on authority and submission, we can incorporate the biblical themes of unity, interdependence, and service into our teachings.... We were created...to be co-laborers together.

In answer to your issue with what she does not include in the book, I offer a bit more of her conclusion.

...Following scripture is always the best answer, but it's not always the easiest. It would be nice to have straightforward lists saying "Do" and "Don't Do." It would be neat and clean.... No mess, no struggle, no wrestling with the truth...lists would seem easier, but they aren't good for us.... It's better for us to struggle and wrestle with what God teaches us in the Bible.... God has given us clear boundaries.... He's also left us with liberty within those boundaries. When we try to make lists...we end up with extra-biblical and unbiblical rules....

My final thoughts. Submission can be misunderstood as merely a state of asking permission from 'the head.' Christian Patriarchy teaches that if a wife knows her husband well enough, she shouldn't need to ask anything. The spiritual implication becomes: If your intellectual knowledge of Scripture is complete enough, your obedience will be spontaneous, nullifying needful prayer and repentance. Such an implication includes obedience that flows naturally, apart from the interac-

tion of guidance found in Scripture's commands, admonitions, or exhortations. It flows unsummoned, just like a 'good' wife 'knows' what her husband wants before he speaks, be that sex or a cup of coffee. Submission is no longer the intentional, proactive subjection of our own will to the will of Another in a relationship of love.

Distorting what is supposed to be a picture of Christ and the church only distorts one's understanding of our life of sanctification. The theology becomes what our relationship is to God the Father, and we lose Christ who is the Face of God to us in the covenant relationship, lovingly responding to His people by the Spirit when they cry out and seek His mercy. Misunderstood headship teaches that asking something of the head is considered impudence, a form of rebellion, an attack on the headship of the home. It's the wife putting herself first. Under such headship, asking is a sinful attempt to control the head and merit favor in the relationship. This forces an understanding of our sanctification as being utterly passive in all aspects: 'man does nothing.'

Errors with headship and submission are worth understanding and guarding against; that I believe, is the point of the book. Error in our world-and-life view about marriage breeds spiritual and theological distortions and vice versa. A final question from Miller is pertinent for all of us, "What layers do you need to peel back about your own beliefs about women and men?" We should seek to be faithful to what the Bible teaches in all things; I still think Miller's book is helpful in this. And, perhaps the omissions you find in Miller's book are answered in Aimee Byrd's book *No Little Women*.

Sincerely,  
Brenda Hoekstra  
Hudsonville, MI



## All around us

Rev. Audred Spriensma, pastor of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church, Dyer, IN

# The leaked draft of the Supreme Court majority opinion

I along with most Americans were shocked to hear Tuesday morning (May 3) the news of the draft of a Supreme Court majority opinion concerning *Roe v. Wade* that was leaked to the public. What a shocking breach of Supreme Court confidentiality and secrecy! The draft was written by Justice Samuel Alito. It would strike

down *Roe v. Wade* and abortion as a constitutional right for Americans. Chief Justice John Roberts confirmed the document's authenticity the next day.

In the draft opinion, Samuel Alito wrote that *Roe* "must be overruled." The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* would be the culmination of a decades-long project

of the conservative legal movement. According to the draft, the court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which held that there is a federal, constitutional right for a woman to have an abortion. *Roe v. Wade* has been around for almost 50 years! Can you begin to imagine the blood-bath of innocent lives of children ripped out of their mother's wombs in that time? Oh America, what blood you have on your hands, that makes the deaths of the Jews by Hitler small in comparison! It was reported that more than 860,000 abortions took place in the United States in the year 2017.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, it is not just American leaders who are at fault. Polls taken indicate that only 30% of Americans oppose abortion while 70% approve. This is nothing new; the evil kings of Judah and Israel, like the heathen around them, caused their children to pass through the fire to the idol Moloch. Under current law, government cannot interfere with a woman's choice to terminate a pregnancy before 23 weeks. That is about the amount of time that it is believed a fetus can live outside of the womb.

It appears that five of the conservative justices would be voting to overturn *Roe*. Chief Justice Roberts does not want to completely overturn *Roe*, meaning that he would have dissented from part of Alito's draft opinion. The five justices that would make up the majority would be Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barret. Of course, this is merely the first draft of the majority opinion. This would be discussed among the justices, and no final vote would be taken and publicized until late June or early July. This decision would not end abortion, sad to say, but only declare that abortion is not a federal constitutional right for women. The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibits the federal government to make decisions that the people and their representatives in the States can make.

The history behind the Supreme Court's involvement arises out of a Mississippi law (*Dobbs v. Jackson, Planned Parenthood*) that would have banned abortion at 15 weeks of pregnancy. Lower courts blocked that law so that it was appealed to the Supreme Court. The court took up this matter on December 2021. It appears that six of the justices would have upheld the Mississippi law, bringing the time that an abortion could be performed on a woman down to 15 weeks. While the new Supreme Court ruling would take away the federal constitutional right for a woman to have an abortion, it would now put the matter in the hands of the states to make rules. Planned Parenthood is already setting up clinics near the borders of states that ban an abortion so that woman can easily cross the border to get an abor-

tion. Nearly half of the states already have or will pass laws that ban abortion, while others have enacted strict measures regulating the procedure. The *Dobbs* case was a very highly anticipated case of the court's term, and most expected that the conservative majority was likely to scale back or outright overthrow *Roe's* policy.

Reaction to the leaked majority opinion was swift on Tuesday, with large groups protesting in front of the Supreme Court, and in many different states, calling for Justice Alito to be sacked. Quickly, Democratic politicians voiced their opposition and abhorrence. President Biden and Vice President Harris issued separate statements lamenting the prospect of overturning *Roe*. Harris said *Roe* was about abortion but "at its root, protects the fundamental right to privacy. What is clear is that opponents of *Roe* want to punish women and take away their rights to make decisions about their own bodies. Republican legislators in states across the country are weaponizing the use of the law against women."<sup>2</sup> Biden said in his statement, "If the court does overturn *Roe*, it will fall on our nation's elected officials at all levels of government to protect a woman's right to choose. And it will fall on voters to elect pro-choice officials this November. At the federal level, we will need more pro-choice Senators and a pro-choice majority in the House to adopt legislation that codifies *Roe*, which I will work to pass and sign into law."<sup>3</sup> Both the president and other politicians wanted to broaden their scare tactic, branding the Republicans as an unruly group that will not be content with limiting abortion, but wanting to invade the bedrooms of Americans with turning down the rights of same-sex marriage and all the other parts of the LGBTQ+ movement. While Democrats were eager to talk about the substance of the draft opinion, which most Americans support, Republicans were overwhelmingly focused on the leak itself, calling for investigations and even prosecutions.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said, "By every indication, the leak was yet another escalation in the radical left's ongoing campaign to bully and intimidate federal judges and substitute mob rule for the rule of law. The integrity and independence of the Supreme Court is once again under attack. We have within the court itself someone else threatening the independence of the court."<sup>4</sup> Chief Justice Roberts declared, "This was a singular and egregious breach of that trust that is an affront to the court and the community of public servants who work here...intended to undermine the integrity of our operations, it will not

<sup>2</sup> *Washington Post*, May 3, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> *Washington Post*, May 3, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> *Washington Post*, May 3, 2022.

<sup>1</sup> Data collected by Guttmacher Institute (guttmacher.org).

succeed. The work of the court will not be affected in any way.”<sup>5</sup> Roberts has called for an investigation and possibly calling in the FBI for it.

---

Let’s ask, why? Why, (and by whom) was the draft opinion leaked now? Is it to put pressure upon the justices in how they will vote in June? Or, with mid-term elections coming up, was it to take the American public’s attention away from such issues as inflation, the border, unemployment, and instead to rile up the voters against any perceived threat to the freedom to kill unborn babies?

But what does all this have to do with us as believers and the church? No, the church as an institution does not get involved in politics. Her only calling is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But as individual believers, we are by God’s providence citizens of a state and country. Our calling, in Scripture, is to pray for those in authority, that they might rule righteously, and through their rule we as believers and church can live peacefully and have the freedom to carry out our calling. Have you and will you be praying for our Supreme Court justices that they will rule rightly?

As citizens, we have the privilege to have a say in what takes place in our country and states. How important is it for believers to vote—for president, governors, representatives, and senators? It was President Trump who, when running for the White House in 2016, campaigned with the promise that, if elected, he would appoint Supreme Court justices who would overthrow *Roe*. He kept his promise. That is quite different from our current president! If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, the Democrats will seek to get a bill signed in the House and Senate. They would need sixty votes, which they do not have now. Do you think that the votes of Christians are important in the elections? Governors in states are vowing that they will make sure that women in their states will have the freedom of abortion. Is it important that we as Christians use our freedom to have a voice in who our next governor will be?

We, as believers, are thankful knowing that God is on the throne in heaven. While “the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing...and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed.... He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The LORD shall have them in derision.” God rules with His Son, Jesus Christ sitting on the throne. We, as believers, are responsible in our calling as citizens. God in His providence is pleased to use people in their positions to do His will, whether it was a Joseph as the

second highest ruler in Egypt, or Daniel with the kings of Babylon and Persia, or even an unbelieving Esther or Cyrus to carry out His will and purposes for His people. And He is pleased to use each and every one of His chosen people in their own place and calling. God says in Psalm 2, “Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.... Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” What a comfort as we view and live in a godless age.

### Synod 2022 of the CRC: Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality<sup>6</sup>

One of the items to appear before the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church this year is the report of the “Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.” This was a committee mandated by Synod 2016. This report was supposed to report in 2021, but because there was no synod held last year due to covid, it is now before Synod 2022. This report is being followed closely by the CRC churches because of homosexuals and lesbians, and same-sex marriages in their churches, some of them even allowed to hold special offices in the church.

Reactions are flowing in from various classes (regional groups of churches). Nine classes are sending communications supporting the human sexuality report. Classis B.C. North-West further asks for another study committee “to provide in-depth pastoral guidelines for implementation of the report.” Classis Wisconsin asks synod to “admonish and if necessary discipline church officebearers and assemblies that have acted and taught contrary to the official teaching of the CRCNA without going through the process of submitting overtures or gravamina.” Classis Rocky Mountain is sending a communication and a request that question the report’s thoroughness and ask synod not to accept it.

Classis B.C. North-West asks the synod “not to accede to the recommendation that synod declare that the church’s teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status. Classis California asks synod to correct an apparent contradiction involving cohabitation. Is it sinful and condemned because of its association with premarital sex, or is it proposed as a pos-

---

<sup>5</sup> *Washington Post*, May 4, 2022.

---

<sup>6</sup> This material is gleaned from a report by Allissa Vernon, new editor of *The Banner*, May 2022, pp. 16, 17.



sibility for same-sex-attracted people? Classis Southeast U.S. asks for revision of the CRC's position on homosexuality. In 1973, the CRC Synod made a distinction between being a homosexual and the acting out of it; the inward desire is not a sin, only the acting out of it.

Classis Eastern Canada and Classis Hamilton ask for further study so that the committee can listen carefully for a period of time to the real-life experience of persons and families dealing with minority sexual orientations and gender identities within the CRC congregations. This is what a previous synod did during its meeting at Calvin University, where people with their various colored clothing sat in the audience. What a strange request to come to synod, which is supposed to articulate a "Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality." Did you get that? Not a touchy-feely report of what our sinful natures desire, but a *biblical* theology. Go to the Scriptures!

Classis Toronto sent a communication from a congregation where "from its beginning people of different sexual orientations have belonged." The hope was that this would lead to "greater understanding of the potential deep impact that decisions flowing out of the human sexuality report might have on a number of churches." It is exactly this that caused a split in the Reformed Church

of America (RCA) last year with many churches leaving that federation. This is also a threat after this synod. Several churches have installed these persons into the special offices of the church trying to force the issue.

Classis Grand Rapids East asks synod to reject the human sexuality report. Although there are denominational differences over LGBTQ+ matters, can't we just persevere in unity and mission, they ask? Classis Grand Rapids East asks synod "to adopt in principle a local discernment" approach to differences over LGBTQ+ matters and ordination. This is also the way the CRC dealt with the historicity of Genesis 1-11 and the matter of women in office. They said that there are different correct interpretations of Scripture.

Two classes are asking for new task forces. Classis Hackensack wants a committee "to develop a church order procedure to disciple officebearers, including disaffiliation of a consistory or classis initiated by a major assembly." Does not that sound like the year 1924? Classis Grand Rapids South wants a committee that would recall and articulate core matters of agreement and then create and provide suggestions, principles, and approaches for how the churches and individuals treat each other.

We have a vivid picture of the end times, when apostasy abounds in the church. May God keep us faithful.



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan

# Immortality

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Unbelieving man suppresses this knowledge. But he can never shake off the fear of death. More than anything, man wants to live, and to keep living forever. Fallen man dreams of immortality. Not true immortality, but endless life after the imaginations of his own heart. In every age he chases after this dream. He looks to all sorts of things to lengthen his days and deliver him from death: idol gods, a mythical fountain of youth, scientific progress. But none of these can give man the immortality for which he thirsts.

For those whom the one true God has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, immortality is not a dream but a gift of grace, merited by Jesus Christ, and revealed in the gospel. The true God is the living

God (Ps. 42:2), who has life in Himself (John 5:26). He enjoys infinitely blessed life within Himself, life which is at heart fellowship among the divine three persons of the Trinity. As the living triune God, He is the "King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God" (I Tim. 1:17). Here immortality is placed alongside eternity and wisdom as an attribute of the divine essence. Jehovah is the God "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (I Tim. 6:16). God alone is immortal in the absolute sense. He possesses the eternal fount of His own being within Himself. The above two verses from Timothy explain what immortality really is. It is not endless existence. It is so much more! The word *immortal* in I Timothy 1:17 means "un-decaying," that is, imperishable, not liable

to corruption. In I Timothy 6:16 immortal is a different Greek word meaning “undying” or “deathless.” Immortality is deathlessness, the complete separation from every power of decay and corruption. Jehovah is the deathless and undying God!

The God who only hath immortality alone can give immortality to people subject to death and decay such as we are. It is a wonder of grace that His eternal plan has been to do just that: to give His elect people to Christ, so that in the fullness of time, Christ might merit for them and bestow upon them immortal life. This grace of God, “which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” has now been revealed “by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Tim. 1:9). By His atoning death and victorious resurrection, Jesus Christ “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). He has abolished death, defeated it, and broken its power over His people. He brought life and immortality to light when He burst from the tomb on the third day. Jesus arose with new life—*life beyond death, life incapable of dying*. Jesus arose with the same body that went into the grave. But He was changed and glorified. He shares this glory with His people. This life is far better than even the life Adam and Eve had in Eden. It is the highest and most blessed life.

God gives this life to His people when He regenerates them. “Even when we were dead in sins,” God “quickened us together with Christ” (Eph. 2:5). The Holy Spirit implants the imperishable seed of regeneration in the heart of the elect child of God. This seed of new spiritual life is the very resurrection life of Christ

Himself. By His Spirit, the Head causes His life to flow to us His members. We have been quickened together with Christ. We have the seed of immortal life already now! We have passed from death into life (John 5:24-25). The life we now live is a life ‘between two resurrections.’ We have been raised spiritually but we still wait for our bodies to be raised. This shall take place on the Day of Christ, when our Lord Jesus returns and “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). Then we shall receive the fullness of immortal life. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (I Cor. 15:53-54). Our bodies, the same bodies we had in this life, shall be raised by the voice of Christ and transfigured by His power into the likeness of His glory. Then, God’s work of glorification will be complete. We shall be deathless. We shall be undying. We shall be beyond every power of decay, corruption, and death. Indeed, “We shall be like Him” (I John 3:2). “So shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:17).

This is the immortal life that is ours through Jesus Christ. This is the eternal life which you, believer, look forward to with earnest hope and eager expectation. Let us “by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). Let us “comfort one another with these words” (I Thess. 4:18). Let us give all praise and thanks to the “King eternal, immortal, the only wise God!” (I Tim. 1:17).



## Believing and confessing

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

# Of Jesus Christ, true God and man, the only Savior of the world (Second Helvetic Confession, chapter 11b)

### *Christ Is True Man, Having Real Flesh*

We also believe and teach that the eternal Son of the eternal God was made the Son of God, from the seed of Abraham and David, not from the coitus of a man, as the Ebionites said, but was most chastely conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the ever virgin Mary, as the evangelical history carefully explains

to us (Matthew 1). And Paul says: “He took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham.” Also the apostle John says that whoever does not believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not of God. Therefore, the flesh of Christ was neither imaginary nor brought from heaven, as Valentius and Marcion wrongly imagined.

The intent of this paragraph of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) is to defend the real manhood of Jesus in the interests of maintaining the truth that Jesus is the only and complete Savior. For if Christ was not a real man and fully a man, He could not be the Savior of us men. In order to save us body and soul, Jesus had to become a real man, assuming both the body and the soul. The truth of Christ's humanity is as important as His deity.

Although Jesus was fully a man, he was a man like no other man. Besides being a man, He was also the Son of God. Even with respect to His manhood, Jesus did not derive His manhood in the ordinary way in which human beings do, "from the coitus of a man" and a woman. The SHC rules that out. Rather, the Son of God was conceived in the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. Also His manhood Jesus did not derive from Joseph or any other man, but from God, God the Holy Spirit. Jesus was not only virgin born, but He was virgin *conceived*. There could have been no virgin birth, if nine months previously there was not a virgin conception. In this way, Jesus partook of a real human nature, though without sin. Also in this way, He partook of the human nature of Mary, just as any child who is conceived in and born from a human mother.

That God was the Father of Jesus even as concerns His manhood, Bullinger underscores when he speaks of the "ever virgin Mary." We must not misunderstand this statement. Bullinger is not expressing agreement with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. But he is insisting on the truth that she was a virgin when Jesus was conceived in her and she was a virgin when nine months later He was born of her.

In this way also, God fulfilled His promise in the Old Testament that Jesus would be "from the seed of Abraham and David." He fulfilled His promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Abraham's seed is Christ, as Paul makes plain in Galatians 3:16. Later, God repeated His promise to David: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom" (II Sam. 17:12). God is faithful to His word of promise. His promise is sure and never fails.

Bullinger appeals to three Scriptures in support of the doctrine of the real humanity of Christ. First, he appeals to the historical account of Jesus' birth in Matthew 1. The account concludes with verse 23, in which Matthew describes Jesus' birth as fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a

son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." The virgin shall bring forth a son. He will really be her son. For that reason, He will be "God *with us*," very really one with us.

Next the Swiss Reformer appeals to Hebrews 2:16. He introduces the reference in the epistle to the Hebrews with, "And Paul says...." Interestingly enough, Guido de Bres in the Belgic Confession, also attributes the epistle to the Hebrews to Paul.<sup>1</sup> But the reason for Bullinger's appeal to Hebrews 2:16 is that it proves conclusively that our Lord assumed a real human nature: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham."

And third, Bullinger appeals to what John says in his first epistle, that whoever does not believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. What John actually says in I John 4:3 and II John 7 is that whoever does not *confess* that Jesus is come in the flesh is not of God. But behind public confession of the truth, is belief of the truth in the heart (Rom. 10:9). What John adds in both verses is reference to antichrist. In I John 4:3, he says that whoever denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of "that spirit of antichrist." In II John 7, he says that whoever confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Besides grounding the truth of Christ's real humanity in sacred Scripture, in this section of the SHC Bullinger mentions three heretics and heretical groups that deny Christ's humanity. Against these he engages in necessary polemics. Early in the article, he refers to the Ebionites. When he states that Christ is "the eternal Son of the eternal God [and] was made the Son of man, from the seed of Abraham and David, not from the coitus of a man," he adds, "as the Ebionites said." The Ebionites were adoptionists in their Christology. They taught that Jesus was biologically the son of Joseph and Mary. Because of the outstandingly good life that He lived and His complete obedience to God's law, He was adopted to be the Son of God. Those who embraced the error of adoptionism denied Jesus' eternal pre-existence, His deity, and His virgin birth. Thus, they denied that Jesus was truly God and man, both divine and human.

Bullinger also mentions Valentinus, or Valentius. Valentinus (c. AD 100–c. 180) was a Gnostic. Reportedly, he was moved by envy because, in his view, he was passed over and another was chosen instead of him to be a bishop. Sadly, in the history of the church this

1 The fact is, however, that the writer of the book of Hebrews does not identify himself. There are other "guesses" as to whom the human writer might be, though there are good reasons for attributing the epistle to Paul.

sort of envy has often been a factor in controversy and schism. Valentinus taught that there were three types of people in the world: spiritual, psychical, and the merely material. Only the spiritual had the potential to receive the gnosis, the higher knowledge that allowed them to be caught up into the pleroma and merge into the divine. Those who had only a material nature were doomed to perish. According to Valentinus, Christ could not have had a real humanity and could not have suffered in that humanity. He only *appeared* to be a man.

Marcion of Sinope (c. AD 85–c. 160) taught a dualism, the equal ultimacy both of good and evil. The God of the Old Testament, whom he called the Demiurge, the creator of the physical world, was a local deity of the Jewish people. In contrast to the wrathful God of the Old Testament, Jesus preached a God who was loving and merciful. Marcion denied the incarnation and taught that Jesus only appeared to be a man, much like angels in the Old Testament appeared as men. The early church fathers Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian denounced Marcion as a heretic. They rightly insisted that only if Jesus actually became a man could He redeem us men.

Bullinger concludes the paragraph: “Therefore, the flesh of Christ was neither imaginary nor brought from heaven” as the heretics “wrongly imagined.” Christ was really and fully a man. If He was not truly a man, neither could He redeem us men.

#### *A Rational Soul In Christ*

**Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ did not have a soul bereft of sense and reason, as Apollinaris thought, nor flesh without a soul, as Eunomius taught, but a soul with its reason, and flesh with its senses, by which in the time of His passion He sustained real bodily pain, as He Himself testified when He said: “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38). And, “Now is my soul troubled” (John 12:27).**

Did Jesus have a real human soul? Did His humanity extend beyond His body and include His soul? That is the question answered by Bullinger in this paragraph of the SHC. It never fails that when I put these questions to teenage catechumens, they hesitate. And when I follow that up with, “Jesus had a human body but a divine soul, right?” almost all the heads in the catechism room nod in agreement. Then I ask the students to turn with me to the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 18, and I read aloud the first paragraph of the article, the title of which is “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ.” The last part of the paragraph reads that Christ “did not only assume human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, that He might be a real man. For since the

soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that He should take both upon Him, to save both.”

If Christ did not assume a human soul as well as a human body, neither could He have saved human beings in their souls. What is fallen? Is only our body fallen and depraved? Or, is also our soul fallen, under the power of sin, and in need of salvation fully as much as our body? The latter, of course, is true. We are totally depraved, and it belongs to the totality of our depravity that it extends to both body and soul. If Jesus only saves our bodies, He is half a Savior. Only if He saves us body and soul is He our complete Savior.

In this paragraph, Bullinger says that Christ possessed “a rational soul.” Sometimes it has been said that Christ possessed “a reasonable soul.” This is the expression that is used in the Athanasian Creed, point 32, which confesses concerning Christ: “Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.”<sup>2</sup> All that is meant by these expressions is that Christ had a real soul with its ability to reason, which is unique to human beings in comparison to animals. “A soul with its reason,” Bullinger goes on to say in the paragraph.

In order to prove that Christ did not only have a real human body, but also a human soul, Bullinger cites two Scripture passages. The first is Matthew 26:38, “Then saith [Jesus] unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.” The second passage is John 12:27, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” In both passages, Jesus Himself speaks of His soul. One passage to which Bullinger does not appeal, but to which I point catechumens and seminary students is Jesus’ word from the cross, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Jesus commended His spirit, or soul, into the hands of God, while His body went into the grave.

Bullinger refers to two heretics who denied that Jesus had a real human soul. The first is Apollinaris of Laodicea, sometimes referred to as Apollinarius (died AD 382). To his credit, Apollinaris was an outspoken opponent of Arianism. However, his fervency to defend the full deity of Christ led him to deny that Jesus was fully a man, having a human soul. His error was condemned by the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381. It is the Creed of Constantinople, crafted by this Council, that is quoted above.

In addition to Apollinaris, Bullinger cites Eunomius

<sup>2</sup> Athanasian Creed, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in American, 2005), 14.



of Cyzicus (died c. 393). Eunomius was a leader of an extreme Arian sect, which denied that Jesus was the divine Son of God, of one essence (being) with God the Father. This sect was known as the “Anomeans,” from the Greek which means “not similar,” that is, Christ’s essence was “not similar” to the essence of God the Father. They were also called “Heteroousians,” which is another Greek expression meaning “of differing substance,” that is, Christ’s essence was essentially different than the essence of the Father. The members of this

sect were also called “Eunomians,” after their most distinguished leader, Eunomius. So un-godlike was Jesus that He possessed only a human body without a soul altogether. Eunomius’ views were also condemned by the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

With the orthodox of all ages, the Reformed faith confesses Jesus Christ to be true God and true man, “for us men and for our salvation.”<sup>3</sup>

---

3 Nicene Creed, in *The Confessions and Church Order of the*

## Report of Classis East

May 11, 2022

First PRC of Holland, MI hosted Classis East in the Redeemer Christian School building in Zeeland, MI. After Rev. Bill Langerak declared classis properly constituted, Rev. Dennis Lee assumed the chair and presided over the business of the meeting. Recognizing the importance of making decisions in harmony with Scripture as set forth in our Reformed confessions, classis requires every first-time delegate to sign the Formula of Subscription. Two delegates attended classis for the first time and therefore signed the Formula. Classis exercises mutual oversight by receiving answers from each member church to the questions found in Article 41 of our Church Order. Rev. Lee asked these questions and received satisfactory answers from the delegates representing the nineteen churches of Classis East. The stated clerk gave his report regarding his work over the last four months; classis approved his work. The reporter for the Classical Committee fell sick and was absent, which means the committee will have an extended report at the September meeting of Classis East.

Classis adopted a pulpit supply schedule for the two vacant congregations in the east, Grace PRC and Hudsonville PRC. At its March, 2022, meeting, Classis West requested that Classis East assist in providing pulpit supply for one of its vacant churches. In light of a positive change in circumstances (Classis West has one less vacancy due to Rev. Marcus’s acceptance of the call to Peace PRC), the Classical Committee of Classis West sent a letter to Classis East withdrawing this request.

In previous sessions Classis East had appointed two special committees. One committee reported that it did not have a report on its mandate to propose changes to the rules of classis regarding the distribution of its agenda. The second committee brought a report regarding its study of how to handle sexual abuse cases to classis that was received for information. Classis thanked the committee for its work so far, encouraged the committee

to continue its work, and looks forward to acting upon recommendations from the committee in the future.

Two consistories asked for the advice of classis before continuing in the work of Christian discipline applied to members of their congregations. Classis advised one consistory to proceed to the announcement of the name of an impenitent confessing member per Articles 76 and 77 of the Church Order. Classis advised the other consistory to proceed with the erasure of a baptized member who, though often admonished by the elders, continues to walk in sin.

Classis approved of the request of Rev. Carl Haak to retire from the active ministry after forty-three years of faithful service. Classis marked the occasion by giving opportunity for several delegates to speak appropriate words about Rev. Haak’s service to the churches, singing the doxology, and pausing from its business to allow the delegates to speak individually to Rev. Haak and his wife, Mary. By an official decision Classis East formally and sincerely “expressed its deep appreciation and thanks to God for the 43 years of Rev. Haak’s humble and godly leadership and active ministry in our churches.” Contingent upon the approval of Synod 2022, Rev. Haak’s retirement will become official on September 1, 2022.

The catering committee of First Holland PRC did an excellent job of taking care of the delegates during various breaks and lunch. The women well deserved the thanks expressed by the chairman, Rev. Lee, on behalf of classis.

The expenses of the meeting totaled \$1,161.56. For its next meeting Classis will convene on September 14 at Byron Center PRC. After the vote to adjourn the meeting, Rev. Lee closed with prayer. The delegates began leaving for home around 3:15 p.m.

We thank God for the unity of our churches expressed in the meeting and pray for God’s blessing upon the decisions.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk, Classis East



## News from our churches

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

### PRC news (denominational)

On April 24 **Doon PRC** sent out a call to Rev. J. Smidstra (First PRC-Holland). On May 15 he declined this call.

After receiving **Peace PRC's** call on April 27, Rev. J. Marcus accepted it on May 1. We rejoice with him and Amy and their family in God's provision of a new place of kingdom labor. May the Lord by His grace and Spirit prepare them for ministry in this congregation.

On May 1, Prof. B. Gritters (PRC Seminary) declined **Grace PRC's** call. Subsequently, the Council formed a new trio of Revs. N. Decker, E. Guichelaar, and W. Langerak.

On May 8 Rev. S. Regnerus (Lynden, WA) declined the call from **First PRC-Edmonton**.

On May 11 **Hudsonville PRC** called Rev. J. Smidstra from a trio that became a duo of Revs. D. Noorman and J. Smidstra (because Rev. Marcus took the call to Peace PRC).

**Classis East** met on May 11 at the new Redeemer Christian School location in Zeeland, MI (hosted by First PRC-Holland). The agenda was lighter than in past years, with one major item being approval of Rev. C. Haak's emeritation (Georgetown PRC) in September (cf. report above).

### Seminary news

When the PRC seminary ended its semester on May 13, it marked the end of Prof. R. Dykstra's term as professor. For 26 years he faithfully served the churches as professor of Church History and NT Studies, and now with Prof. D. Kuiper fully in place, Prof. Dykstra can retire. As professor, that is. For last year he accepted the call to Byron Center PRC and now serves full time in that capacity. We thank the Lord for his diligent labors in the seminary and pray that he may continue to be used for great good in the Byron Center congregation, in Classis East, and in the churches as a whole. The Theological School Committee along with Byron Center PRC has planned a retirement dinner for June 20.

In late April the faculty announced that Arend Havenman (entering his third year, from Trinity PRC) has been licensed to speak a word of edification in the churches. Two mission trips are also planned for him—first to the Philippines in June-July (3 weeks) and then to Mexico in late August (1 week). Senior Matt Koerner is also going on a mission trip to Mexico this summer prior to his internship in Randolph PRC.

### Missions/evangelism news

**Pittsburgh PRC** hosted her annual spring lecture on Friday, May 13. Rev. J. Marcus spoke on "Redeeming the Time."

**Southeast PRC's** Evangelism committee asked the church members to join them in another door-to-door event on Saturday, May 7, from 10 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. As it was stated in her bulletin, "This is a great way to increase awareness of our presence in the immediate community and to let others know of the truth of the gospel."

**Wingham PRC's** Consistory has decided to start an evangelism committee for the purpose of organizing and facilitating their outreach as a church to the local community. According to the announcement in her bulletin, "the committee is subject to the consistory and intended to be a servant of the congregation to help us be faithful witnesses of our Lord." The pastor and two couples have been appointed initially to this EC. We pray God's blessing to be on their endeavor.

**Zion PRC's** Mission Committee held a short presentation about her role as the calling church on Sunday evening, May 8, which included a question-and-answer period. They have a trio of Revs. A. Brummel, J. Smidstra, and C. Spronk and will call on May 29.

### PRC news (congregational)

As the saying goes in the northern part of the country, "There are two seasons: winter and construction." With a slight variation, the same holds true for church maintenance projects. With that in mind **Crete PRC** had her parking lot repaved in May. And I suspect there will be other such 'construction' projects in the churches this spring and summer.

This is also the time of year when Sunday School classes begin for the summer months. To mark their new season, **First PRC-Grand Rapids, MI** held "a kick-off pizza dinner" in the church basement on May 6.

**Hope PRC-GR:** The congregation held her annual picnic on Saturday, May 7 at Hope PR Christian School. The games began at 3:00 P.M. and dinner afterward in the gym. From the weather we had that day, it seemed to be a great day for a picnic.

### Young people/ young adult activities

The **Lynden YP** hosted a Memorial Day Breakfast on May 30. I don't know about you, but I'm a big fan of these church breakfasts. Of course, the suppers are

good too. And the ice cream socials never fail to satisfy. Well, I think you get the point.

**Unity PRC YP** held a Hanging Basket Sale and Pop-up Shop on Saturday, May 7, in the parking lot of Zion Christian School in Byron Center. Visitors could browse over 200 hanging baskets, homemade baked goods, and products from several select crafters and vendors. The fundraiser was to help the YP with convention costs.

The **Wingham (ON) YP** participated in a community-wide garage sale on Saturday May 28. They asked the congregation for their “gently used yet resalable items.” They also served food, and members were encouraged to “drop in for some fellowship.” What a great idea! I’m always impressed with the variety of fundraisers that our young people come up with. I’m certain their parents are involved in that process too.

Registration for this year’s **PRYP’s Convention** (Faith PRC) at Camp Cedarmore in Kentucky (August 1-5) was extended until May 4. Over 500 young people are planning to attend—exciting, and reason for deep thanks to our God! Continue to visit the convention website and Facebook for updates.

### PR Christian school activities

**Faith CS (Randolph, WI)**—FCS held its Jog-a-thon on Friday evening, May 6. The run began at 6 P.M., followed by prayer on the basketball court, and then supper in the FCS Commons. Supporters were

encouraged to “come out and cheer on the students!” We hope they did and had an “enjoyable evening of fellowship together.”

**Genesis CS (Lacombe, AB)**—The Parent-Teacher Association is set to host the annual Spud Supper on Friday evening, June 3.

**Heritage CS (Hudsonville, MI)**—Grades 1-3 presented their Elementary Music Program on May 11 in the afternoon. The 5th -8th grade bands and choirs presented a concert on May 17 in the main gym. The audience (which included my wife and me) enjoyed the program and the students did indeed use their talents to “praise our God in song.”

**Hull PRCS**—The 8th graders of Hull PRCS hosted their Heritage Day on the afternoon of May 12 in the school gym. Students displayed their biographies and various mementos of their family histories. What a great idea! I hope they had a good turnout.

**Redeemer CS (Zeeland, MI)**—RCS sponsored a Rejoice Evening on Saturday evening, May 21. It was held at the school’s new facility in Zeeland, MI. Supporters and friends were invited to enjoy “a night of worship and fellowship” with light refreshments served afterward.

**Sioux Falls CS (SD)**—On May 5 the students of Sioux Falls PRCS participated in a combined chapel service hosted by the Free Christian School (Edgerton, MN). The chapel was held at the Edgerton PRC with refreshments at Free Christian School afterward.

## Announcements

### Resolution of sympathy

Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches express Christian sympathy to Joanne Huiskens and her family in the death of their beloved husband, father, and grandfather, **Jon Huiskens**. Classis gratefully acknowledges and commemorates Mr. Huiskens’ 46 years of faithful service as the Stated Clerk of Classis East. It is our prayer that Joanne and her family will know the comfort of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the love and communion of saints in their loss. Romans 6:5: “For if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection.”

Classis East of the PRCA (Meeting of May 11, 2022; Article 13)

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathies to Joanne Huiskens in the death of her husband, **Jon Huiskens**. We are thankful for Jon’s many years of faithful service in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Jon was the PRC archivist from 1980-2018 (38 years). He held the position of Stated Clerk of Classis East from 1971-2017 (46 years). And he served on the Theological School Committee—often as secretary—from 1973-2017 (44 years). We also remember his many years of service as a faithful elder, especially those terms served in our congregation in which we remember the good example he set for his fellow officebearers. We praise God for the gifts He gives to men for the good of His church. We rejoice that our brother has now entered into the joy of his Lord. May we who remain be also “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58). We pray that Joanne, her daughters, and their families may receive the comfort spoken of in II Corinthians 1:3, 4, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

Rev. Cark Haak, President Kevin Timmerman, Clerk

### Wedding anniversary

It is with joy and thankfulness to God that we celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of our parents, **Joel and Kelly Dykstra**, on June 13. We praise God for His faithfulness to them and us, and we thank Him for their godly example in our lives. “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children” (Psalm 103:17).

Jacob and Katelyn  
Curtis and Laura  
Joey and Emily  
Elizabeth  
Caleb  
Nicholas

Byron Center, Michigan

### Wedding anniversary

The family of **Cornie and Trudy Jonker** express love, respect and gratitude to their parents as they celebrate the special milestone of 75 years of marriage on June 2. We honor them as our father and mother and thank them for the Christian education for which they sacrificed to give us, and for honoring their baptismal vows by giving us a godly upbringing. We cherish them both and pray for God’s blessing upon them as they celebrate such a joyous occasion. Psalm 103:17-18: “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.”

Don and Jacque Jonker  
Phil and Linda Jonker  
John and Darlene Graeser  
Eric and Marilyn Ophoff  
Bernie and Laurie Kamps  
Eugene and Sharon Kamps  
23 grandchildren  
73 great-grandchildren

Jenison, Michigan

## Reformed Witness Hour

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

**Rev. R. Kleyn**

June 5—A Memorable Family Reunion  
Genesis 45:15-46:34  
June 12—Israel Preserved in Egypt  
Genesis 47  
June 19—The Blessing on Joseph  
Genesis 48, 49:22-26  
June 26—Joseph’s Confession Concerning Providence  
Genesis 50:14-26

### Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Doon, Iowa on Wednesday, September 28, 2022, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 29, 2022. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon’s Consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

### Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 2022, at 8:00 A.M., in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 13, 2022.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk

### Call to Synod!!

Synod 2022 appointed Zion Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI the calling church for the 2022 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2022 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 14, 2022 at 8:00 A.M., in the Zion Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI.

The Pre-synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. Kleyn, president of the 2021 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Consistory of Zion PRC  
Mike Potjer, Clerk

### Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* will be published only once each month during the summer months: June, July, and August.