

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

September 1, 2022 • Volume 98 • No. 20

## Diligently teaching our children

Rev. Michael DeVries

## How shall the PRCA respond to chastisement?

## Or: When God “walks contrary”

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## God’s answer concerning the coming of Babylon

Rev. Ronald Hanko

## Antinomians? Without a doubt

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## The Belgic Confession and missions

Rev. Daniel Kleyn



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.

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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.

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Website for RFPA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

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

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## Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI

# Diligently teaching our children

**And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.**

**Deuteronomy 6:7**

Issues in education have been increasingly found in the news headlines. Outraged parents are demanding wide-sweeping reforms in the content and quality of our country's system of public education. How thankful we must be for the good Christian schools that have been established and maintained in the localities of so many of our Protestant Reformed congregations!

Our good Christian schools again are opening their doors for another season of instruction. We must never forget that basic to all excellence in education is the home. That is true from the viewpoint that the fundamental responsibility for instruction of children belongs to the parents. Scripture exhorts parents to instruct the seed of the covenant. Parents are to train up their children in the way that they should go. At baptism we as parents promise to instruct our children "in the afore-said doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein to the utmost of your power."

That our homes are basic to education is clear too from the viewpoint that the very structure of our schools is parental. In some instances, it was several generations ago that parents and the broader covenant community joined together to establish our schools. Through the years and continuing to the present time, covenant parents, together with friends and fellow saints, have maintained the schools in countless ways. And parents govern the school through their involvement in the school society and in service as a member of the board. Covenant teachers stand authoritatively in the place of the parents providing the instruction in our schools. This parental structure is a vital aspect of the Reformed, covenantal character of our schools.

We must never forget that throughout the education of our children the home remains the most significant and influential factor. The school cannot rise higher than the homes of the students. Already by the time a child enters school he is either handicapped or equipped

by the attitudes, values, and skills he has received from his home. And the fact that we have our own Christian schools, the fact that we have enrolled our children and pay tuition for their education, may in no way lead us to neglect our on-going responsibilities in our homes. This Word of God in Deuteronomy holds before us this parental calling in a very powerful way: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

This parental instruction involves teaching: "and thou shalt teach...." Literally, the word *teach* means to sharpen, to use pointed speech, to express oneself definitely and concisely. It means to instruct with diligence, with persistence. This word looks at teaching from the point of view of expressing something clearly and sharply to the understanding of the child.

What is it that must be taught? "Teach them diligently unto thy children...." The word *them* refers back to verse 6 where we read, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart." "These words" refer to the law of God. Israel had received that law at Mt. Sinai. In chapter 5 we see that Moses had called the children of Israel together as they were about to enter the promised land and he was about to leave them. Moses repeated the law, the Ten Commandments, reminding the people of the circumstances in which they had received that law.

In the opening verses of chapter 6 Moses explains his purpose in teaching the people the law—that the children of Israel might fear the Lord, walking in the way of His good commandments. Moses intended these words, not only for the parents, but also for their children: "...which I command thee, thou and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life." In hearing and observing this law it will be well with them and they will increase greatly in the promised land. In verses 4 and 5 Moses summarizes the law, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Clearly, the content of this instruction was to be the law of God as it pertained to the whole life of His people. We are not to teach our children a mere formal code of conduct—a list of do’s and don’ts. We are not diligently to teach them some arbitrary set of rules, but this law of the love of God. This law of God demands that with all of our being, in every moment of our existence, in every sphere of life, we love God. In a word, we must teach our children obedience. Love and obedience are so closely connected that they may signify the same thing, and the one without the other is inconceivable. As Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). God has shed His love abroad in our hearts. And in that love we are called to teach our children to love Him!

How much time is needed for this instruction in Jehovah’s precepts? Will the Sunday worship services, along with catechism classes, be sufficient? If we throw in the time that our children spend in our Christian schools, will that be enough? In very vivid and graphic language this text makes the answer to these questions crystal clear: “When thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” No room is left for any doubt about this matter. Very simply, we are commanded to teach our children the ways of Jehovah at all times and everywhere! When we are at home—sitting in our house. When we are away from home—walking by the way. All through the day, from the time we rise up out of bed till we lie down at night.

It is emphasized that the parent is held responsible for *all* the training of the child. Moses is not addressing the whole congregation of Israel in general. This is very personal. He speaks in the singular. He addresses the individual parent, “*Thou* shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.” He is speaking to you and to me! This teaching is fundamentally the duty of the parents. God has entrusted the children to them. Parents have been given this obligation. It is the parent’s responsibility even though at times we may perform that duty through someone else—the pastor, an elder, the school teacher. Let us not shirk this responsibility. Also today, in this world in which we live, we are responsible for the instruction our children receive from morning till night, in the house and outside our home. We are responsible for what they learn on TV and electronic devices, for the books they read, for the places they go, for the people and friends with whom they associate, for every aspect of their lives!

Perhaps we are inclined to breathe a sigh of relief as our children again enter the doors of the school. We certainly must be thankful for the assistance we receive

from our good Christian schools. But the schools do not relieve us of our responsibilities. As was mentioned, the school cannot rise higher than the homes of the students. How can our homes help develop the attitudes, values, and skills that are so essential for our covenant children?

Our homes must strive to teach our children to understand and respect authority. As parents we must ingrain in our children the principle that all authority is of our sovereign God (Rom. 13:1). Parents and teachers, though sinful and imperfect, have been appointed by Him to exercise authority over children. And very early on our children must see and understand this. How careful we must be not to undermine the authority of the teacher with criticism in the presence of the child. Let us strive to instill the beautiful testimony of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 39, which explains what God requires in the fifth commandment: “That I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother, and all in authority over me.” Then, by God’s grace, our children will be receptive to the instruction and guidance of the teachers.

In close connection, as parents we must insist on proper Christian behavior. Our children, who are sinful by nature just as we are, must be nurtured, guided, and disciplined in the ways of the Lord. We ought not tolerate selfishness, cruelty, rebellion, lying, profanity, cheating, and the like—not in our homes and not in our schools either. Ideally our children should see that their school holds the same set of values and requires the same acceptable behavior as their home, all of which is based squarely on God’s Word.

Let us also take our calling seriously to help our children develop a sense of responsibility. How quick we can be to jump to our child’s defense! How easily we can excuse them for unacceptable behavior. We must help our children face reality and to be honest with themselves. A sense of responsibility will help the child accept himself with both his strengths and his weaknesses.

The concept of “order” ought not be neglected in our homes. As parents we must teach our children to be orderly, to be organized, and to complete their work. We should stress the importance of neatness, organization, thoroughness, perseverance, and satisfaction with a job well done—especially by our own example.

Finally, we ought to consider the atmosphere of our homes. We should strive to make our homes warm, stable, and secure. In our day many homes are the opposite—cold, chaotic, and in turmoil. What place do screens of television and other devices have in our homes? Do we encourage reading—good reading in our homes? Al-



ready in the early days of the Reformation, Luther called for good Christian schools for all of the children. His reason was that all of the children of the church must be able to read and study the Bible, understand the preaching, and in time, teach their own children.

May we never forget that as parents we are always teaching our children. By our speech, by our actions, by all of our life we are teaching them! Are we teaching our children the precepts of Jehovah when we sit in our house, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up?

As we reflect upon our calling diligently to teach our children, we conclude that in ourselves we are woefully inadequate. This concerns such profound and serious matters—we deal with children who by grace are Jehovah’s heritage! Yet we find comfort and encouragement in the fact that the grace of our covenant-keeping God underlies it all. Else it would be an exercise in futility.

Our God is faithful to His covenant with us and with our children!

The covenant comprehends the entire creation of God and all creatures of creation organically considered. As we read in verse 4, He is Lord over all, Lord over every sphere of life. As Lord, He demands that His precepts be taught with respect to every sphere of life. And at the heart of that covenant stands Christ as the covenant Head through whom alone the covenant is realized. So it is that we bring forth and instruct our children in the hope of the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise (Acts 2:39).

Our God will bless the efforts put forth in our homes and in our Christian schools. With that assurance may we take up our task as the most honorable upon the face of the earth. It is also the most rewarding. For, of all of our possessions, of all that we have, only our children by God’s grace will go with us into glory!



## Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Hudsonville PRC

# How shall the PRCA respond to chastisement? Or: When God “walks contrary”

**And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant... and...will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.**

**Leviticus 26:15, 23, 24**

God’s heavy hand has fallen upon the PRCA in recent years.

First was the schism of 2021 and all that precipitated it and follows it. Doctrinal error. Controversy. Criticism. Suspicions. Warfare. Departure. In the schism, churches were damaged, some severely; families were divided, friends separated, marriages and homes broken. What always attends schisms attends this one: malicious accusations, public assaults, slanderous allegations. The PRCA has been reeling, beat down by God’s heavy hand.

But schism was only the beginning of His chastisement. Soon after the schism, shameful and often

murderous sexual offenses have been (and are being) exposed for the world to see. Fornication. Homosexuality. Sexual abuse, even of children. By officebearers, teachers, parents, grandparents. And what attends such sin and its exposure are utter confusion, shame, anger, bitterness, as well as accusations of minimizing, blame-shifting, covering, betrayal.

The outcome of both schism and sexual sin is another heavy blow from the Lord. Sheep scatter. Some to other denominations. Others—disgusted with ‘church’ and hypocrisy—scattered into the world. Church bulletin after church bulletin reports requests for membership records “sent to their home,” which does not mean a happy transfer to another PRCA or sister, but an unhappy departure from the denomination.

If one does not question whether this is the hand of God upon the churches, maybe he wonders why the news of it should be hung out like dirty laundry for all the church neighbors to see in the pages of a magazine. I share the wonder...and the shame. It is shameful, es-

pecially when some neighbors may gloat over our falls, others may say “raze it! raze it!” (that is, “demolish, leave it destitute,” Psalm 137), and others, worse, may take occasion to blaspheme like Gath and Askelon at the death of Saul and Jonathan. But it is necessary openly to speak of it. The Lord who chastens also restores, we pray, but only when we humble ourselves before Him; confess our faults that He is exposing, both to Him, to victims, to one another; and fully and deeply repent of our disobedience for which He sends the chastisements.

For that is the proper response to the Lord’s chastisement: humility, confession, repentance, and return. Pray the Lord works this in the PRCA, each of us considering himself first. Let the officebearers start, for purifying judgments begin in the house of Levi.

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Chastisement is the holy hand of the holy God upon His wayward people. His *enemies* He destroys; His *people* He chastens. Our troubles, we pray, are the heavy hand of God’s loving chastisement.

Chastisement is the Lord’s *regular* way of dealing with His church. “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth” (Heb. 12) applies not only to individuals. It also applies to churches. I want to spell that out carefully here. Israel learned this lesson early in her history. Leviticus 26 (Leviticus was the ‘catechism book’ for Israel’s youth) and its parallel in Deuteronomy 28 ought to be very familiar to Christians today, for they teach the manner of God’s dealings not only with the old covenant people, but also with the church today. “If ye will not hearken unto me...I will walk contrary to you...I will set my face against you.”<sup>1</sup> In Deuteronomy 8, Moses had reminded the people that “as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee” (8:5). Chapter 28 spells that out in detail. Almost immediately God carried out His threats in the distressing days of the judges. The hand of the Lord was against Israel for evil wherever they went “as the LORD had sworn unto them” (2:15), an obvious reference to His oath-like warnings in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Only a few generations later, God reminded new King Solomon of the same truth: when Israel sins against God, the heavens will not bring forth rain; pestilence and blasting and mildew will destroy their crops; their enemies will besiege them in their cities and smite them (I Kings 8), all at the hand of a loving, but chastening God. And so it befell them and in eight generations Hezekiah observed that God’s wrath was against the people for turning

their backs on Him. To correct them, God delivered them “to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing....” Then, at the very end of the Bible, the Lord addresses the seven *churches* in Revelation and repeats the truth, as though His last words to His church are a reminder of this elementary truth: “As many as I love, I rebuke, and chasten; be zealous, therefore and repent” (3:19). God regularly chastens *churches*.

As we now experience in the PRCA, chastisement of a church may be *severe*. At times God’s hand is very heavy. Israel experienced that. In Deuteronomy, God warned that His people would be cursed in the city, cursed in the field, cursed in the basket, and cursed in the store; cursed when they went out and cursed when they came in. They would be smitten with consumption, smitten with fever, smitten with burning, smitten with swelling.

We may not yet have any idea how severe. We should not be surprised in the PRCA today if chastisement *increases* in severity. If Israel would not be reformed by their initial chastisements, the Lord would punish them “seven times more” for their sins (Lev. 26:21). They would flee when none pursued and be slain by their enemies. If not reformed by that, “yet seven times more” (v. 24), and again “seven times more” (v. 28). Severe, increasingly severe, chastisements until the people of God would “bethink themselves” and repent. The PRCA’s chastisements may not be over. They may become worse. Our understandable hope that the heavy hand of God may soon be lifted because our hearts are sick over the afflictions may be a “hope deferred,” which will make our heart sicker (Prov. 13:12).

The severest of chastisements mentioned in Leviticus 26, at least for those who love God’s covenant and His covenant people, is that wild beasts would rob the people of God of their *children* (Lev. 26:22). As if that were not awful enough, Moses warned, if worse came to worst, the people themselves would eat their own sons and daughters (v. 29; see also Deut. 28:53), a horrible prophesy that came to pass in the days of Elisha (II Kings 6) when two mothers agreed to eat their own children, one each day. But the nightmarish act of these Israelitish women is no worse than the spiritual devouring of children whom parents abuse, physically or sexually. Sometimes the very shepherds of the sheep do so (Jer. 23; Ezek. 34). The stench of the vile sin drives the children away. Little ones are offended.

God’s judgments may be so severe because the sins of God’s people, at times, are so dreadful. The sins for which God chastens His people are *covenant* sins. “Despising God’s statutes” and “not doing his commandments” are described as “breaking my covenant” (Lev.

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin’s comments on both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are masterful explanations of how God deals with His people today.

26:15). “Breaking” the covenant is not destroying it but *violating* it, as a man by his adultery violates his marriage, ‘breaking’ his vows, or a citizen ‘breaks’ the law when he murders. Neither the husband nor the citizen *destroys* the law (makes the law cease to exist), but that does not lessen the awful reality of breaking God’s covenant. So when God lays His heavy hand on Israel, He explains that He is “avenging the quarrel of my *covenant*” (26:25). The book of Judges opens with God’s explanation of His hot anger: “Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant...” (2:20). Of course! For the covenant is marriage, sealed with an oath, a friendship between a gracious God and an undeserving people through Jesus Christ. Violation of God’s marriage covenant is so offensive to God. How horribly offensive! Our sins are adultery of the worst kind—unfaithfulness to God. When we offend, we *must* be corrected because God will see to it that there is holiness in His marriage to us. God’s chastisement is *covenant* correction of *covenant* offence. We should be familiar with this language, for we sing, frequently:

*Not right with their God in heart and in will,  
They faithlessly broke His covenant still...*

(Psalter 213)

O, how the PRCA must have offended God by gross covenant sins! We do not imagine, do we, that such heavy blows are warranted by minor offenses! Major blows come for major failures and capital offenses.

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One of the greatest offenses to God’s covenant of *grace* is the sin of pride. I cannot think of a greater contradiction to the confession of ‘grace’ than the attitude of pride. It is the ultimate irony that those who pride themselves (I use the expression deliberately) on maintaining the *doctrines* of grace—God’s goodness to the utterly unworthy—could consider themselves somehow better than others. This explains why, when God threatened chastisement, He said that He would “break the *pride* of her power” (Lev. 26:19) and that their “uncircumcised hearts” must be “*humbled*” (26:41).

*Through pain and trouble thou hast led and humbled all our pride...*

There is personal pride. There is denominational pride. There is doctrinal pride. There is a ‘holier-than-thou’ pride. Pride manifests itself, as with the Pharisee, in thanking God that we are not like others; in a hyper-critical disdain for other less-pure churches; by an inward focus; by a forgetting that, if we do differ from others, we did not make ourselves to differ. Let us all spend some time with our covenant Friend, pleading

that He search our heart and see if there be any wicked (proud) way in me.

Luther once said, referring to the Roman Catholic Church, that God judged pride with sexual perversions. The Roman Catholic Church, especially in its clergy, was filthy with sexual sins of every sort—fornication, homosexuality, pedophilia. Luther viewed this, in part, as God’s judgment upon their pride. He was, I am sure, alluding to Paul’s teaching in Romans 1 that God judges men who exalt themselves over God by giving them over to sexual perversions of every kind, climaxing in the vile sins of homosexuality. Today, God may judge a proud man by giving him over to sexual sin. There ought not be a question that He may judge a proud denomination in the same manner. A church unfaithful to God’s marriage covenant will learn, in a very painful way, what unfaithfulness looks like.

There are many sins for which the Lord may be chastening the PRCA. How many are the idols among us? Which is more important, the Spirit Who leads in holiness, or ‘spirits’ in which is the “excess” of debauchery? Does the doctrine of the covenant mean more to us than the *life* of the covenant? Are the treasures we lay up for ourselves heavenly or in our bank accounts and properties? Does our budgeting of time show that bodily exercise, which does profit for a little while, or exercise in godliness is more important to us (I Tim. 4:8)? How does our time in front of screens compare with our time with God’s Word and good reading? What wicked things do we set before our eyes? (Ps. 101:3).

Let each examine his own heart, as the Lord’s Supper form exhorts. Let every man acknowledge “the plague of his own heart,” as Solomon asked. The chastisement may come for different reasons for different members or different congregations.

How then shall churches, a denomination, respond to such heavy blows from the Holy Father?

### **Consider the ‘reason,’ not the ‘rod’**

First of all, the proper response is not criticizing the rod by which God inflicts His blows upon us.

By that I mean that we must not first of all look at the schismatics or the sexual offenders, culpable as they are in their sins. Not *first* of all. It is certainly necessary to examine and deal with the sins of schismatics, even as it is necessary (absolutely!) to examine and deal with those who commit sexual sins and especially those who destroy others with those sins. At times, the church cannot respond soon enough to such sin—directly, boldly, decisively, righteously.

But I mean that when a church is chastened her business must be carefully, prayerfully, and patiently to ex-

amine the *reason* for which she is chastened rather than to criticize the rod by which she receives it.

It would have been easy for Israel to point out the wickedness of Eglon the King of Moab who oppressed them for 18 years until God raised up Ehud to deliver them. But their proper response was to repent in humility for the “evil they had done in the sight of the Lord” (Judges 3:12) and cry to Him for deliverance. It would have been easy for the few Israelites left in Jerusalem to show how evil were the Babylonians who carried them away captive to Babylon, or how hypocritical were the Edomites who watched in glee. But their proper response was to submit to the punishment and humble themselves for their long weaknesses and many provocations of God. Of course, Eglon was wicked; of course, Nebuchadnezzar was evil. And in the end, God’s justice required that both be dealt with. But Israel’s main calling when they were oppressed was to submit to the judgment and repent of breaking God’s covenant. Their spiritual adultery demanded God’s heavy hand.

Let us deal with the schismatics as God requires us to do. Let us deal with the sexual offenders and murderers of the little ones as God requires us to do. But let us also ask ourselves the questions about why God walks contrary to us, why He has set His face against us.

### Learn from Leviticus

We can learn again from God’s instruction to Israel in the elementary lessons of Leviticus. Each of these bullet points is worth an article, maybe a sermon.

- Let us confess our own iniquity (Lev. 26:40). Our own. First the mote (beam?) in our own.
- Let us confess the “iniquity of our fathers” (26:40; II Chron. 29:6, 9), what we may call generational sin. What have we winked at, perhaps not even recognized?

- Let us confess that God “has walked contrary to us” (26:24, 28, 41). The troubles we endure are not random, or happenstance, but the hand of God.
- Let us “accept the punishment” (26:41, 43) of our sins, acknowledging that our guilt is worthy of what God has sent, and far worse.
- Let us hear Hezekiah’s mandate to the priests: “Carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place” (II Chron 29:5). Discipline is always painful, shameful, humbling. But leaving the filth among us will only prolong, and maybe increase God’s judgments.
- Let us “spread forth our hands” (I Kings 8:38) toward the temple of God where has been revealed to us His own righteous judgments in the judgment of His own Son, trusting His righteousness and rejecting our own.

Our covenant God chastens. He also graciously restores and embraces His penitent, remorseful, humbled people. He will “remember his covenant” (Lev. 26:42). He will not cast His own away. “Neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I *am* the LORD their God” (44).

*Great Shepherd Who ledest Thy people in love,  
‘Mid cherubim dwelling, shine Thou from above;  
In might come and save us, Thy people restore,  
And we shall be saved when  
Thy face shines once more.*

*O haste, Lord, to hear us and pity our woes,  
Affliction our portion, despised by our foes;  
O Lord, God Almighty, in mercy restore,  
And we shall be saved when  
Thy face shines once more.*



## All around us

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

## 2022 CRC Synod report of human sexuality

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it will report briefly on key decisions taken at the 2022 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) regarding the report on human sexuality. Second, it will reflect on a couple of the more significant immediate implications of these decisions.

What occurred at this summer’s CRC synod has a history beginning in 2016. That year, the CRC synod adopted the following recommendation:

That synod appoint a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical



conceptions of gender and sexuality. The central aim of this theological task will be to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.<sup>1</sup>

The finished report was detailed, 175 pages in length, covering the topics of a biblical theology of human sexuality, pornography, gender identity, homosexuality, singleness, pre-marital sex and cohabitation, polyamory, and divorce.<sup>2</sup> While the report in full would be worth reading, one can read a briefer, beneficial, executive summary (twelve-page) produced by the committee, which can be accessed at the footnoted link.<sup>3</sup>

The report has been public since 2020. It was initially to be treated at the 2021 synodical meeting, which was canceled due to the covid pandemic. And so, for some two years, the question has been looming: where would the CRC come down on this report? The debate was spread out over two days. The result was surprising, to both the supporters and detractors. The majority voted in favor of the recommendation “that synod recommend the HSR to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality.”

While that was the main decision taken with regard to the report, it was the follow-up action that is especially noteworthy. The synod adopted by an overwhelming majority (131 in favor, 45 against, and 2 abstaining from the vote) a decision that now outlines the CRC’s official interpretation of Lord’s Day 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism regarding what constitutes a violation of the seventh commandment of the law of God. I quote the adopted recommendation in full:

That synod affirm that “unchastity” in the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extra-marital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the Seventh Commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation “an interpretation of [a] confession” (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, a decision such as this should not be needed. The clear biblical and historical understanding of the seventh commandment has always been that the above-listed sins are gross violations of the law of God. But on the other hand, it is noteworthy as one thinks about membership in the Christian Reformed Church. Why? To affirm homosexuality and same-sex marriage in the Christian Reformed Church now explicitly contradicts the official doctrine of the church as taught in the creeds. Again, to make this clear should not have been necessary in light of the teaching of Scripture. But the liberalizing of the CRC over the last decades on the issues of human sexuality and same-sex marriage has warranted this decision. The implications are seismic. To contradict the official teaching of the church as set forth in her creeds warrants the exercise of Christian discipline. The necessary implication is that there is no place in the CRC for those who affirm homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The large swaths of the CRC that have pushed the homosexual and same-sex marriage agenda stand in opposition to this decision.

Before reflecting on the immediate aftermath of these decisions, one point is worth making clear regarding the content of the report. The 2022 adopted report maintains the teaching of the CRC’s 1973 Report on Homosexuality that draws a distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. A person possessing the former bears only minimal responsibility, is to be received into the church and given opportunities to serve in the body of Christ. It is only the homosexual act that is contrary to the will of God in Scripture.<sup>5</sup>

The extent to which the decisions of this synod will affect the Christian Reformed community is still unknown. However, there have already been some noteworthy developments. One of them began almost immediately after the above decisions were taken at the Synod, arising out of overtures that came to the synod regarding this issue. It concerned a matter I reflected on in a previous installment of “All Around Us” when developing the extent of sexual immorality in the realm of the church. In the summer of 2020 the Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI ordained into the office of deacon a woman in a same-sex marriage. Synod 2022 of the CRC, again with a large majority, instructed “Neland Ave. CRC to immediately rescind its decision to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage, thus nullifying this deacon’s current term.”<sup>6</sup>

1 [https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynod/2016\\_acts.pdf](https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynod/2016_acts.pdf)

2 [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/human\\_sexuality\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/human_sexuality_report_2021.pdf)

3 [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/summary\\_human\\_sexuality\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/summary_human_sexuality_report_2020.pdf)

4 <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Advisory%20Committee%208B%20Majority%20-%20Synod%202022.pdf>

5 <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/homosexuality>

6 <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Advisory%20Committee%202B%20-%20Synod%202022.pdf>



The response of the Council of Neland Ave CRC indicates that there will be an ongoing battle over this issue. The Council came out with the following statement: “We take the admonition of Synod 2022 very seriously. However, as we prayed, wrestled with the Word, and discerned the Spirit together, our conscience told us that we would be both disobedient to God’s call, and less than fully loving to all His children if we ‘immediately rescinded’ our decision to ordain this deacon. After prayerful consideration of the directives of Synod 2022, we have decided to appeal its decisions.”<sup>7</sup>

These synodical decisions will also impact Calvin University. Calvin University has been openly supportive of the LGBTQ community. In that same article I wrote referenced above, I also reflected on the support at Calvin University for Claire Murashima, the first openly gay student body president. The edition of the *Chimes*, the school magazine, pictured her kissing another woman with a rainbow flag draped over their shoulders. However, of late, there has been pushback against the homosexual and lesbian agenda at Calvin. It began even before the above decisions of Synod 2022. Most notable was the university’s decision not to renew a professor’s appointment on account of officiating a same-sex wedding.<sup>8</sup>

7 <https://religionnews.com/2022/06/29/grand-rapids-church-wont-remove-gay-deacon-votes-to-appeal-denominations-order/>

8 <https://calvinchimes.org/2022/04/21/calvin-denies-reappointment-for-professor-who-officiated-same-sex-marriage/>

But now, with the decision of this summer’s synod, many at Calvin University may be facing a crossroad. One-third of Calvin’s faculty signed a letter expressing concerns with the Report on Human Sexuality after it was released publicly. To teach at Calvin University, one must sign a document that indicates alignment with the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church, one of which is the Heidelberg Catechism, the official interpretation of Lord’s Day 41 now having been established by this year’s synod.

It will be worthwhile to follow the developments in the CRC and at Calvin University in light of these decisions of Synod 2022. Why? First, we want to be aware of the positions regarding human sexuality that are present in the church world, especially as we strive to be faithful in our witness against the error and supportive of those with whom we are one. Second, the developments at Calvin University are good to follow in light of those who may consider attending this institution. Third, reading about gender, sexual orientation, gender dysphoria, and all the rest, as it is developed in the Report of the CRC, is used to sharpen our own understanding of these subjects in order to help those in our own midst who may have questions and struggles. How will we respond when we are confronted with a loved one struggling with same-sex attraction or a boy who says to his mother that he feels like a girl? These are the issues of the day. We must be ready to face them.



## Search the Scriptures

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

# God’s answer concerning the coming of Babylon

Previous article in this series: May 15, 2022, p. 370.

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread

themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.

Habakkuk 1:5-11

The second section of Habakkuk is God's answer to the cries of His prophet concerning Judah's wickedness. God did not disagree with Habakkuk's assessment of Judah's wickedness and need for correction; nor did He rebuke Habakkuk for raising the issue, but tells him that He would raise up the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) who would execute His judgments on Judah. Though God speaks of what He would do, He was already raising up that heathen nation whom He would use against Judah. If Habakkuk prophesied around 615-610 BC, then he prophesied at the time Babylon and the Chaldeans under Nabopolassar (625-605 BC) were expanding their empire and just before they became the world power of the day. In 612 BC Nineveh, the capitol of the Assyrian kingdom, fell to the Chaldeans and in 609 BC Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Necho of Egypt at the battle of Carchemish (Jer. 46:2).

Josiah, the last godly king of Judah, died in 609 BC in battle with Pharaoh Necho, and in 597, just eleven years later, the Chaldeans would make their first incursions into Judah, removing Jehoiachin the king from the throne and replacing him with Zedekiah. It was then that the Chaldeans took many of the nobles of Judah, including Daniel and his friends, to Babylon, and coming again in 586 BC besieged and destroyed Jerusalem, another eleven years later. Habakkuk very likely lived to see God's word to him fulfilled. The reference to "your days" in Habakkuk 1:5 probably includes the prophet, though it is addressed to others as well.

The book of Habakkuk is very personal, a kind of dialogue between Habakkuk and God, but God makes it clear that His answer to Habakkuk's cries is not only for him personally but for others as well (note the "ye" of verse 5). Those others included the wicked element in Judah who would not believe Habakkuk's prophecy. Of them especially God is speaking when He says: "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you" (v. 5).

That unbelieving element included those who could not swallow the idea that God would use the heathen Chaldeans to punish Judah. In their self-righteousness and pride they were convinced that God would never punish them. They persecuted the prophet Jeremiah for prophesying Jerusalem's captivity, and believed the false prophets, like Hananiah and their message of peace and safety (Jer. 28). They did not believe even when the Chaldeans were at the gates of Jerusalem.

God's word concerning the coming of the Chaldeans was also for the believing remnant in Judah. That is not evident from Habakkuk 1 but becomes clear in chapter 2. God's answer must have been unexpected, and

Habakkuk would have further difficulties with that answer (1:12-2:1). But he would come to see, as did all those who believed, that God would never forsake the righteous who would survive those evil days by faith.

God not only speaks of the coming of the Chaldeans but also of their conquests and power, already evident in the days of Habakkuk. He calls them a "bitter and hasty nation" (v. 6), a reference to their cruelty and to the speed of their conquests. The land God describes is the land of Judah, through which the Chaldeans would march, and the word "dwellingplaces" in verse 6 is a word that is often used in the Old Testament of the tabernacle and temple, God's "dwellingplace" with His people. The Chaldeans would treat the land of Judah and its institutions as their own.

There is an irony in God's description of the coming of the Chaldeans. Verse 7 describes the fear that their coming would inspire and their disregard for any judgment but their own: "their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves." They would do what was right in their own eyes and there would be no appeal against their ruthlessness and cruelty. In Judah, too, they would show that lack of regard for any judgment but their own—in Judah, where, as Habakkuk had complained, "judgment doth never go forth" and "wrong judgment proceedeth." In Judah, in Habakkuk's day, it was useless to seek justice and to expect that the law would be upheld; it would be even worse under the Chaldeans. Verse 8 is a further description of the violence and speed of their conquests which echoes the word of Deuteronomy 28:49: "The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand." In verse 9 Habakkuk speaks again of the violence with which the Chaldeans would come, a violence that would be just retribution for the on-going violence of Judah (v. 2). Verse 9 also mentions the coming captivity of Judah and in terms that remind us of God's promise to Abraham that his seed would be like the sand of the seashore. Now God says that the Chaldeans would gather up Judah as the sand, a striking and sad ending to what God had promised so long before. God's punishments always fit the crimes men commit.

Verses 10 and 11 have a different emphasis. God tells Habakkuk that no nation or kingdom would be able to stand against the power of the Chaldeans (v. 10). The power of kings and kingdoms would be laughed at by the Chaldeans, something Judah's kings would experience when Jehoiakim was "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. 22:19), and when Zedekiah was carried

into captivity after witnessing the slaughter of his sons, the last thing he would ever see (II Kings 25:7). All this would only increase the pride of Babylon and its kings, though they would ascribe their power and victories to their own god, probably the god Nabu. The first part of verse 11 is difficult but probably refers to the fact that all restraint and moderation would be destroyed by their pride in what they had accomplished. Nebuchadnezzar, the conqueror of Jerusalem, is the great example of such “change of mind.” He would set up an image of himself in the plain of Dura and would refuse to humble himself in spite of Daniel’s admonitions (Dan. 4:27). Calvin understands the passage that way: “But he says—then He will change his spirit; not that there was before any humility in the Chaldeans, but that success inebriated them, yea, and deprived them of all reason.”<sup>1</sup>

Never would the Chaldeans or Nebuchadnezzar recognize that they were in the hand of God and were His instrument for punishing Judah. And God, whose instrument they were, would be offended and sinned against, both by their conquest of Judah and by their worship of the idol Nabu. God’s description of them, of their pride and of His use of them parallels His description of the Assyrians in Isaiah 10, who though they were the “rod of God’s anger” against Judah and the ax with which He hewed Judah, nevertheless were guilty of boasting and of great offence against Him and came under His severe judgment.

Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood (Is. 10:12-15).

God’s word through Habakkuk is, therefore, a remarkable testimony to the sovereignty of God over sin and evil. Wicked men, even devils, are in His hand and are used by Him to accomplish His ends, but the wickedness, in this case the offence, remains theirs always.

God cannot be charged with the evil men do, though their evil is under His direction and control and used by Him for His own ends.

God tells Habakkuk and the remnant that He would do something amazing, something that would inspire awe and wonder among the nations (v. 5), as indeed it did. The rise of Babylon as a world power was amazing and can only be ascribed to God, as was their downfall just a century later. But the most amazing thing in God’s dealings with Judah is His sovereign use of the wicked and cruel Chaldeans, and His use of them in such a way that the wickedness of their dealings with Judah remained theirs and could not be charged to God. That is always a reason to “wonder marvellously,” though it is also an occasion for unbelief and scoffing.

Such was God’s answer to Habakkuk, an answer both unexpected and terrifying, and one that would raise further questions. It was, however, also a reminder that God does not overlook sin, as is abundantly evident in the cross of our Savior. It was a reminder that He, the sovereign Ruler of all things, does everything in His own way and in His own time. It was above all a message of comfort that reminds God’s people that those whom God uses to chastise them He also judges for their wickedness. Thus it was in the days before the captivity. So it is now and thus it shall be when the end comes.

That the message of these verses is for all time is obvious from the quotation of Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13:40 and 41: “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.” The differences between Acts and Habakkuk are due to Paul’s quoting from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, but the message is the same.

Acts 13 records the history of Paul’s first missionary trip and verses 40 and 41 are part of the sermon he preached in Antioch in Pisidia. Paul applies the words of Habakkuk to the unbelieving Jews of his own day, who after Paul’s sermon was finished “were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” (Acts 13:45). They, too, like the Jews of Habakkuk’s time, stood in imminent danger of God’s judgment. The gospel, as Paul told them, would be taken from them as a consequence of their unbelief. God would not only punish their unbelief and wickedness by taking away the privileges they had enjoyed, but would also give the gospel to a “bitter and hasty nation” who would possess the spiritual dwellingplaces of the Jews.

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Minor Prophets* (vol. 4), p. 35.

The words of Habakkuk are God's condemnation of unbelief, the unbelief that will not bow in the face of the judgments and threatenings of His Word. We must humble ourselves, repenting of our sins, when we read of God's judgment and when we see them coming to pass. We must never continue in the foolish confidence that His judgments are for others and not for us, as though we somehow are excluded from those judgments by our status as a "covenant people" or by our own works and righteousness. If the ignorant unbelief of the Chaldeans, who were God's instruments, made them guilty and worthy of His judgment, how could the Jews with better knowledge escape those judgments? How can we possibly escape, who know of His sovereign righteousness in His dealing with men: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb. 2:2, 3).

How appropriate, then, the prayer with which Cal-

vin concludes his explanation of this passage of God's Word:

Grant, Almighty God, that as our sins cry continually to heaven, each of us may turn to repentance, and by condemning ourselves of our own accord may anticipate thy judgment, and thus stir up ourselves to repentance, that being received into favour, we may find thee, whom we have provoked to take vengeance, to be indeed our Father: and may we be so preserved by thee in this world, that having at length put off all our vices, we may attain to that perfection of purity, to which thou invitest us; and thus lead us more and more to thyself by thy Spirit, and separate us from the corruptions of this world, that we may glorify thee before men, and be at last made partakers of that celestial glory which has been purchased for us by the blood of thy only begotten Son. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (vol. 4), p. 27.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

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# Antinomians? Without a doubt (2)

Previous article in this series: July 2022, p. 418.

**Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.**

**Colossians 4:6**

## Introduction

In the previous article in this series, readers were introduced to the first error that is being promoted by the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), on account of which they are justly accused of being antinomians. That error is the teaching that forgiveness precedes repentance. This is "God-first theology," RP theologians contend. At the same time, they insist that this is one of the main doctrines that distinguishes the RPC from the PRC. Besides demonstrating that this is indeed the teaching of the RPC, we also refuted this error from

Scripture. One of the passages to which we appealed was Psalm 32. The versification of this psalm is found in *The Psalter*, number 83. The second stanza is:

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

The versification, sung for nearly a hundred years in the PRC, captures accurately the teaching of Psalm 32. When David confessed his sin, then and only then did God forgive David.

The teaching that God forgives sin apart from and prior to repentance, that He forgives the sinner in eternity long before he sheds a single tear in sorrow over sin



in his lifetime, has been the teaching of the antinomians in the past. This ought to be alarming to those who are promoting the same error today. It was the teaching of the seventeenth-century English antinomians in what is known as the first antinomian controversy.

The faithful Presbyterian stalwart, John Flavel (1627-1691), vehemently opposed these antinomians. In a work entitled *A Blow at the Root of Antinomianism*, Flavel identified as one of the main errors of the antinomians, “That believers are not bound to confess their sins, or pray for the pardon of them; *because their sins were pardoned before they were committed*; and pardoned sin is no sin.”<sup>1</sup> What the RPs are teaching is not new under the sun of antinomian heresy. Although it is true that the RPs have not gone so far as to teach that believers need not confess their sins or pray for forgiveness, this is the necessary implication of their teaching that forgiveness precedes repentance. Forgiven sin is no sin, and if there is no sin, then sin as you please because your sin has already been pardoned eternally.

In this article, I want to show that the teaching that forgiveness precedes repentance is contrary to the Reformed confessions. The Reformed confessions bind every Reformed officebearer, presumably the leaders of the RPC as well. If a teaching is contrary to the confessions, the presupposition is that it is contrary to Holy Scripture. What do the confessions have to say about the relation between forgiveness and repentance?

## Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism treats the tenth article of the Apostles’ Creed in Q&A 56.<sup>2</sup> Even the placement of this article in the *Apostolicum* is worth noting. The confession of “the forgiveness of sins” belongs to that which every believer confesses to be the proper work of the Holy Spirit. It is positioned between the confession of the holy, catholic church and the communion of the saints and “the resurrection of the body.” This indicates that forgiveness of sins takes place simultaneous to the gathering of the church and prior to the final resurrection. Forgiveness of sins takes place in time and history, therefore, and not in eternity antecedent to the gathering of the church. First the Holy Spirit works repentance and confession of sin, and then God forgives His repentant child. At Christ’s second

coming, the repentant, forgiven believer will be raised up to everlasting life. The order in the Creed reflects that of Scripture.

According to Q&A 56, the confession of the forgiveness of sins means “[t]hat God, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long.” My corrupt nature is the nature with which I am born. My sins during my lifetime arise out of my corrupt nature. God’s not remembering my sins nor my corrupt nature follows the sins that I commit and the sinful nature from which they spring. God’s “not remembering my sins” is the Catechism’s description of forgiveness—a biblical description (Ps. 25:7; 79:8). Clearly, forgiveness follows and does not precede repentance.

Q&A 70 of the Catechism speaks of the spiritual reality of baptism, which applies to the elect who are baptized. For them baptism is “to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ.” And what does that entail? “It is to receive of God the remission of sins freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He has shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross.” After his baptism, as he matures in the faith, the child of God appropriates the spiritual significance of his baptism. At that point he “receive[s] of God the remission of [his] sins freely.” Once again, remission (forgiveness) of sins takes place during and not before the lifetime of the child of God.

The Heidelberg Catechism has a similar Q&A regarding the Lord’s Supper. After asking in Q. 76 what it is to eat the crucified body and drink Christ’s blood, the Catechism answers that it is “to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ,” and in that way “to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal.” Faith in Christ, which is always accompanied by repentance, clearly precedes “obtain[ing] the pardon of sin and life eternal.”

Q&A 80 is well known for its condemnation of the Roman Catholic mass as “a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.” Having condemned the mass, the Catechism goes on to ask, “For whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted?” The catechumen responds, “For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ.” The Lord’s Supper has been instituted “[f]or those who are truly sorrowful for their sins,” who yet believe that their sins are forgiven. Forgiveness follows upon true sorrow over sin. The Lord’s Supper has been instituted to confirm to the repentant sinner that the sins over which he grieves are forgiven.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven are treated in

1 John Flavel, *A Blow at the Root of Antinomianism* (repr., Apollo, PA: Ichthus Publications, 2016), 39. Emphasis added.

2 All references to the confessions are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).



Lord's Day 31. Q. 84 asks, "How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?" The first part of the answer is: "Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits." Take note of the order: "whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, [then] all their sins are *really forgiven* them of God." Faith and repentance are first, and then follows forgiveness by God. That is the God-ordained order in the life of the Christian.

### Belgic Confession of Faith

The Belgic Confession of Faith is in full agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching of the relation between repentance and forgiveness. Specifically, the Belgic Confession agrees with the Heidelberg Catechism that repentance precedes forgiveness.

The closing sentence of Article 22, the title of which is "Faith in Jesus Christ," is: "And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins." Faith, which is always accompanied by a turning away from sin and self to Christ, is the instrument that joins us to Christ. It is the means by which all the benefits that are in Christ become ours, including the benefit of the forgiveness of our sins. Faith is the means "to acquit us of our sins." First we believe in Jesus Christ and are sorry for our sins. Then we receive the blessings that are in Christ, including the blessing of forgiveness. This order echoes the experience of the believer.

Article 23 focuses on the outstanding benefit that they who believe on Jesus enjoy: justification. Faith always "rel[ies] and rest[s] upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities and to give us confidence in approaching to God." Faith believes on and rests in Jesus Christ. Relying on and resting in Christ, we enjoy the covering of all our iniquities. Once again, faith in Christ is first and then through faith we enjoy the forgiveness of our sins.

In Article 29, the Belgic Confession treats "The Marks of the True Church, and Wherein She Differs from the False Church." Besides the marks of the true church, the article also treats the marks of the true Christian. Included in these marks is that they "avoid sin" and "crucify the flesh with the works thereof...fight against them through the Spirit all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our

Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in Him." In the way of "taking their refuge in the blood" of Jesus Christ, which is faith accompanied by repentance, believers "have remission of sins." If that is true, and it is, then it must follow that forgiveness does not precede but follows repentance.

### Canons of Dordrecht

The Canons of Dordt is the third of the Three Forms of Unity. And it is certainly the case that the Canons agree with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession on the relation of repentance and forgiveness.

Canons II.5 calls for the promiscuous preaching of the promise of the gospel: "This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations." The command to repent and believe must be accompanied by the promise of the gospel. The promise is that they who "believe in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life." The promise of everlasting life is joined to the command to repent and believe. Only they whose sins are forgiven enter into everlasting life; those whose sins are not forgiven perish. The promise, therefore, is essentially that those who repent and believe will have the forgiveness of their sins. Having the forgiveness of the sins over which they have repented, they will enter into life everlasting. Forgiveness follows repentance and precedes everlasting life. Repentance, followed by forgiveness, followed by everlasting life—this is the biblical order.

The teaching of Canons II.5 is confirmed by Canons II.7. In Article 7 the Canons teach that "as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God." Once again the order in the Canons is faith ("as many as truly believe") and forgiveness ("are delivered and saved from sin"). Faith, which is always accompanied by sorrow over sin, precedes deliverance from sin, the beginning of which is forgiveness.

According to Canons III/IV.10, that some obey the call of the gospel and are converted "must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son." God's conferring "faith and repentance"—the two always together—is the beginning of the deliverance of His elect people. That beginning is followed by rescue from the power of darkness, which includes certainly forgiveness of sins. The divine order of repentance followed by forgiveness is confirmed once again.

The fifth head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt

concerns the perseverance of the saints. Article 5 teaches that by “enormous sins” as well as by impenitence in sin the child of God may “lose the sense of God’s favor for a time.” That happened in the life of king David. But, “on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them.” In the way of repentance, God forgives the sins of His fallen child and once again the light of His fatherly countenance smiles upon him.

Article 7 of the fifth head teaches that when the elect fall, God preserves in them “the incorruptible seed of regeneration.” In His preservation of them, God “renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.” God renews the elect sinner to repentance that he may seek and obtain remission of his sin. The language of the article is clear and its teaching entirely biblical: in the way of repentance the sinner seeks and obtains forgiveness in the blood of Christ.

### Minor confessions

In line with the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity is also the teaching of our secondary or minor confessions,

the Reformed liturgical forms. I refer only to the Form of Excommunication and the Form of Readmitting Excommunicated Persons. In the former, part of the closing prayer is: “But O Lord, Thou art merciful unto us for Christ’s sake; forgive us our trespasses, for we heartily repent of them.” That is clear and striking language: “forgive us our trespasses, for we heartily repent of them.” There can be no doubt concerning what precedes and what follows.

In the Form of Readmitting Excommunicated Persons, we read: “Christ teacheth us in the aforementioned text [II Corinthians 2:7], that the sentence of absolution, which is passed upon such a penitent sinner according to the Word of God, is counted sure and firm by the Lord; therefore, no one ought to doubt in the least, who truly repents, that he is assuredly received by God in mercy.” God’s sentence of absolution is passed upon the penitent sinner, that is, God forgives the sin of those who repent. No one who truly repents ought to question whether God forgives him. Included in the questions put to the person who is about to be readmitted is, “[A]rt [thou] sincerely sorry for the sin and stubbornness, for which thou hast been justly cut off from the Church? Whether thou dost also truly believe, that the Lord hath forgiven thee, and doth forgive thy sins for Christ’s sake.” That is the God-ordained order: sincere sorrow over sin, followed by God’s forgiveness, concluding in reception back into the church.



## Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

## The Belgic Confession and missions (1)

Reformed churches are often criticized for a lack of missionary zeal. They are portrayed as being interested only in themselves and indifferent to those outside the church. They are said to be the least mission-minded churches, having no burden for the salvation of the lost, and being basically uninterested in preaching the gospel beyond their own congregations. The Reformed, it is said, do not believe in missions.

Especially two factors are mentioned as carrying the blame for this. The first is the Reformed doctrine of double predestination (specifically, eternal election). And the second is the Reformed creeds (The Three Forms of Unity).

Those who criticize the Reformed regarding a lack of missionary zeal argue that the truth of God’s eternal election makes it impossible for Reformed churches to be enthusiastic in preaching the gospel to those outside the church and outside the covenant lines of the people of God. According to the critics, the Reformed doctrine of election means there is no need to do mission work, for God will save His people regardless. They are convinced that the only way in which any church can be motivated to preach the gospel in all the world is by believing that God desires the salvation of all men. Our belief in double predestination, and along with it our firm rejection of the well-meant offer of the gospel,

are said to have extinguished all desire and motivation to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

For this reason, many today who still claim to be Reformed, in the interest of doing mission work either reject or else ignore the truth of God's sovereign election and reprobation and enthusiastically adopt and defend the well-meant offer of the gospel. They cave in to the false accusations. In the end they adopt Arminian teachings as their basis for and motivation in doing missions.

The accusation against the doctrine of double predestination is, however, undeniably false. The faithful Reformed church understands that God has His elect in all the nations of the world. That Reformed church also knows that those elect are gathered by Christ and brought to saving faith in Him by means of the faithful preaching of the gospel. For that reason, the gospel must be proclaimed in all the world. Reformed doctrines do not negate or extinguish missions, but the Reformed truth compels the church to be busy in this work and provides her with great encouragement to do it. Because, without the worldwide preaching of the gospel, the elect who have been ordained unto eternal life will not be gathered and saved.

The close tie between the truth of election and the need to be busily engaged in missions is set forth in the first chapter of the Canons of Dordt, which treats Divine Predestination:

And that men [namely, the elect] may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified (Art. 3).

The same close connection between election and missions is also expressed in the Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Missionaries:

Since our God, according to His infinite mercy, has chosen a church unto everlasting life, and gathers it by His blessed gospel out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, unto the fellowship of His Son in unity of the true faith, therefore our risen Savior has ordained an office and has called men to carry the message of salvation to all peoples....

And the Form just mentioned concludes with the missionary being charged: "Go then, beloved brother, and *teach all nations...*" (emphasis added).

That the Protestant Reformed Churches understand the necessity of missions and are not hindered by the truth of election in carrying out this work is clearly seen in the opening paragraph of the Constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee:

The Protestant Reformed Churches believe that...it is the explicit duty and sacred privilege of said churches to carry out this calling [to preach the blessed gospel to all creatures].... We believe that this missionary activity includes the work of church extension and church reformation, as well as the task of carrying out the gospel to the unchurched and heathen.

By the grace of God, our churches have been and continue to be mission minded. One need only take note of the fact that mission work has always been a part of our history—if not through actual mission work on a specific field then at least through the existence of mission committees and the treatment of missions at annual synods.

A spreadsheet I have of our PRCA missionaries shows two interesting and significant facts concerning our mission work from 1970 to the present. First, with the exception of one year (1991), since 1970 our churches have always had at least one missionary at any given time, and often two or more. And secondly, since 1970 we have had over twenty different missionaries laboring either domestically or on a foreign field. For this we give humble thanks to our God.

We certainly admit that our zeal for missions in our history has not always been what it ought to be. We also admit that our mission work has been done imperfectly and that the fruit has frequently been more negative than positive, more failure (from a human point of view) than success. But in spite of our many weaknesses, the Lord has spurred us on to continue this important work in His kingdom. And so we must, until Christ returns.

What we need to understand in this connection is that of all churches in the world, the truly Reformed church is in reality the only church that can properly do mission work. This is because she alone has the proper basis, message, purpose, and motivation for mission work.

For that reason, we as churches ought especially to be interested in and zealous for missions. Even aggressively so. We have been given the true gospel of God's sovereign grace in Christ. God has also been pleased to preserve that gospel in our midst even through recent controversy, which He has used to strengthen us in our understanding of and gratitude for that gospel. God has also given us to know and confess the truth of election. And He has also made clear to us the necessity of the preaching of that gospel (including the commands to repent and believe) as the chief means of grace that He uses for the salvation of the elect.

Those who do not have these truths cannot do proper missions. That is to say, the non-Reformed church

is not able to preach the gospel to all the nations for the salvation of the elect of God. They cannot because theirs is a message of salvation through the will and/or work of the sinner. Such a message is not the message of the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. Those who proclaim such a message are themselves, in reality, the proper objects of Reformed mission work.

We, of all churches, should therefore be most interested in and zealous for missions. By the grace of God, may we continue to busy ourselves in this work, both domestically and in foreign lands.

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Our main interest at the moment, however, is the fact that the blame for a lack of mission zeal in Reformed churches is quite often laid at the feet of our Reformed creeds.

Those who criticize the Reformed in the area of missions claim that the creeds are deficient because they do not specifically address mission work. Or if they do mention it, they do not say enough about it. The critics believe the creeds squelch mission zeal because they are mostly doctrinal and polemical, which characteristics are said to hinder missions because (so they suppose) “doctrine divides.”

These criticisms of the Three Forms of Unity have also come from so-called Reformed men. Most often their criticism is not leveled so much against the Heidelberg Catechism or the Canons of Dordt, but more against the Belgic Confession. The latter is usually singled out as being most defective in stimulating and encouraging mission work among the Reformed.

An example of this criticism is found in the November 1972 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*, the academic journal of the seminary of the Christian Re-

formed Church in North America. In an article entitled “An Analysis of the Belgic Confession as to Its Mission Focus,” Robert Recker, who served as a pastor, missionary, and mission’s professor in the CRCNA, stated the following (pp. 179-180):

The Belgic Confession projects an image, in the main, of a church talking with itself rather than a church before the world.... If I were to construct a missiology today, or if I would hope to be inspired with missionary passion, I would reach for the Bible and not for the Belgic Confession. Reading this confession with analytical care impressed me with the fact that it is partial. And when I read it to discern the missionary focus of the whole Word of God, then I can only say it is inadequate.

To Recker, and many others, the Belgic Confession is irrelevant and inadequate for missions, if not a hindrance and stumbling block. As a result of this thinking, new creeds are written that specifically address mission work. One example is the missions confession that the CRC adopted in 1986 and expanded in 2008, namely, “Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony.”

But is it really true that the Three Forms of Unity are silent or irrelevant regarding missions? Can it be said that they are inadequate as regards the church’s calling to preach the gospel to all nations? And is the Belgic Confession the worst of them all? Is it an asset or is it a liability to mission work? Does it inhibit or does it encourage the Reformed church in its calling to preach the gospel in all the world?

You may recall that we previously considered in this rubric the mission character of the Canons of Dordt and its good instruction and guidance for the church in the work of missions. We hope to do the same in our next article with the Belgic Confession of Faith.

## Pertaining to the churches in common— Sister-church activities

### COVENANT PRC NI NEWSLETTER

#### British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference

After being canceled in 2020 and 2021 because of covid, the 16<sup>th</sup> BRF family conference on “Union With Christ” finally took place at Castlewellan Castle in Northern Ireland (9-16 July). However, as one attendee put it, “This BRF conference was so good that it made up for not having had one two years ago!”

There were 105 people who stayed at the castle for

all or part of the week and another 26 who joined us as visitors once or twice or three times. Saints came from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Northern Ireland, Norway, the Republic of Ireland, Singapore, the United States, and Wales. Apart from a lingering uncertainty regarding the reintroduction of covid regulations, especially those concerning international travel, more would have joined us. As it was, we were delighted with such an excellent attendance and the wonderful people who contributed to a blessed week.



I delivered the Saturday night opening presentation at the conference on “The Psalm of Union” (Psalm 56). Despite the fact that many delegates only arrived in Northern Ireland that day, and some had traveled a considerable distance and/or gotten little sleep the night before, the saints were remarkably attentive.

Prof. Brian Huizinga’s two excellent Sunday sermons set forth the glory of the Savior to whom we are united: “Our Changeless Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 13:8) and “The Lamb of God Come” (John 1:29). In the afternoon, I led a Bible study on “The Bond of Faith,” a topic intimately related to the mystical union.

From Monday to Friday, Professors Engelsma and Huizinga ably developed our beautiful theme of “Union with Christ” with six speeches that explained the nature of this mystical union and related it to the covenant, election, Jesus’ death, the forgiveness of sins, sanctification, our death, Christ’s resurrection, regeneration, marriage, the antithesis, abuse, and more. “‘Christ Is Made Ours:’ Calvin on Union” was my lovely subject for the BRF conference’s historical lecture on Wednesday night.

Look for the audios of all the ten speeches and sermons on the BRF website ([www.britishreformed.org](http://www.britishreformed.org)). Lord willing, these will be reworked and published in the eighth BRF book, dealing with our union with Jesus Christ.



Among other things enjoyed by those at the Castletwellan conference were the two day-trips, ice cream in the cellars, shared meals, informal Psalm-singing sessions, the arboretum, the hedgerow maze, walking around the lake, kayaking, several football matches, hiking up Northern Ireland’s highest mountain, and more. Friendships were renewed or established for the first time during a relaxing week with lovely weather and beautiful scenery in the Mourne Mountains and by the Irish Sea.

I cannot do justice to the riches of God’s truth that was taught to us or the many wonderful aspects of the

conference. I simply add here that reports by others will be carried in the *Standard Bearer* and the *Beacon Lights*, as well as in the next issue of the *British Reformed Journal (BRJ)*, which will soon be sent to the printers. It has never been easier to subscribe to the *BRJ*. It can now be done online and costs just £10 for 4 issues ([www.cprc.co.uk/product/british-reformed-journal-subscription](http://www.cprc.co.uk/product/british-reformed-journal-subscription)).

According to the decisions of the BRF’s Biennial General Meeting, the next conference is scheduled for the summer of 2024 in mainland Britain and its subject will be eschatology. After speaking at all of our previous conferences, Prof. Engelsma indicated that his age would rule him out in the future, sadly. Prof. Huizinga and Rev. Ron Hanco were chosen as the two main speakers for 2024.

Rev. Hanco is well known in the BRF and the British Isles. He laboured in the United Kingdom for 7 or 8 years, speaking in various places in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. He attended several BRF conferences, wrote many articles in the *BRJ* (which are also on the BRF website) and was a member of the BRF Council. He has authored a good number of books and pamphlets (distributed by the CPRC Bookstore), and is writing in the monthly *Covenant Reformed News* again. The CPRC website contains many translations of his various works in several languages. His daughter Jennifer is a member of the CPRC, and Rev. Hanco has visited Northern Ireland several times in the last few years.

On the Lord’s day during the conference (10 July)—John Calvin’s birthday—Rev. Allen Brummel preached at both services in the CPRC in Ballymena for those in our congregation unable to make it to Castletwellan. On Sunday 17 July, the day after the conference’s conclusion, and with most of the conferees in attendance, the worship in the CPRC was led by Prof. Huizinga (Romans 2:4-5) and Rev. Brummel, all of whose three sermons dealt with key texts in the book of Job ([www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI](http://www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI)). After this fine preaching of the Word, fellowship was enjoyed after the evening service around tea and sandwiches provided by the ladies of the congregation.

The next day, the majority of those from outside Northern





Ireland flew home with accompanying sad farewells. Mary's brother, Dave Hanko, with Joan, his wife, and Will, their son, stayed with us at the manse for a few more days, so we got to show them more of our province in the sunshine.

On the evening of the next Lord's day (24 July), Prof. Engelsma preached a powerful sermon on "The Saviour's Assertions of His Sovereignty in Salvation" (John 13:18-19). Since this may well be the last time that he and Mrs. Engelsma will be in the CPRC, afterwards I gave a brief presentation outlining the immense service the professor has provided to our church (in its various forms) over the last 38 years. The videos of both these addresses are online ([www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2Y5Eq5r6y2Fv4JNGXq935PevpTclv1gHprc.co.uk](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2Y5Eq5r6y2Fv4JNGXq935PevpTclv1gHprc.co.uk)).

## Membership

The last three months have probably seen more members added to our church than any other similar period. On 15 May, Joe and Lisa McCaughern with their three children (Jack, Maisie, and Xander) were received into the congregation. Christ's particular atonement was a key doctrine in Joe's coming to the CPRC.

Billy and Anne Gould, and their two adult daughters, Grace and Kerryann, joined us on 5 June. Some years ago, Kerryann married a man from Egypt and became a Muslim. After she was converted to Jesus Christ, he threatened her and they separated. Kerryann found us on the Internet, when she was seeking a church that teaches God's sovereignty in salvation. Grace left her second husband and former church in order to join us, when she was convinced of the Bible's teaching on marriage and remarriage.

Kerryann's oldest daughter, Aaysha, is in a wheelchair for she has serious health issues, making it very difficult for her family to attend the worship services. Aaysha was able to attend on Sunday 12 June, when she was baptized in the name of the triune God with her little sister, Somaya, and their brother, Yossef.

The next Sunday, Ivan Ortu from the Italian island of Sardinia and Colm Ring from Limerick in the Republic of Ireland made confession of faith together. Ivan came across us through the large Italian section on our website ([www.cprc.co.uk/languages/italian](http://www.cprc.co.uk/languages/italian)). Colm attended the Limerick Reformed Fellowship for several years.

All these additions provide greater opportunities for fellowship in the congregation. We produced a new CPRC listing because of changes to various people's membership status, addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses (20 June).

My presentation at the CPRC Annual General Meeting (29 June) included some reflections on the Lord's

growth of our church. After doctrinal divisions in the old CPRC resulted in its disbanding in 2002, it took as many as fourteen years before the number of our confessing and baptized members reached their pre-split levels! Since 2016, the membership has further grown by over 50% and the Lord is bringing in others too. There are now 4-5 times more people attending our services than 20 years ago.

The BRF conference at Castlewellan, as well as additional contact with like-minded believers from our sister churches in North America and Singapore before and/or after the conference, was a great encouragement to both new and old members of our church.

## Others

In March, thanks to a suggestion by a brother in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, we started adding the words of the four Psalms that we sing to our live webcasting. Thus people watching the service online on our main website ([www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming](http://www.cprc.co.uk/live-streaming)) or on the other CPRC webpages (YouTube, Facebook or Sermon.net) can sing along with us.

Around the start of April, our four Monday night catechism classes ended for the season. In 2002, we had one catechumen (and she was 16 years old); now the Lord has given us 24.

On Easter Monday, we held a congregational picnic in Antrim Park near Lough Neagh (10 April). We had additional occasion for fellowship when we had tea after the Lord's day evening service on 24 April, and Bob and Carolyn Prins (Trinity PRC), who were in Northern Ireland for a few weeks, were able to join us.

Our Wednesday night Belgic Confession classes concluded for the season on 27 April. We finished with seven studies dealing with "Ezekiel 40-48 in Eschatology." Both historic premillennialism and dispensationalism claim that these chapters predict a literal Jewish temple in Jerusalem in the future. But is this really true? And, if not, what do the last nine chapters in Ezekiel actually teach? The audios are free online ([www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class](http://www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class)) and the CD box set is available for just £8 (inc. P&P in the UK) ([www.cprc.co.uk/product/ezekiel-40-48-in-eschatology](http://www.cprc.co.uk/product/ezekiel-40-48-in-eschatology)).

With both Monday night's catechism and Wednesday night's doctrine class over, Mary and I were able to spend a few days in Scotland (2-6 May) in order to check out Lendrick Muir as a possible BRF conference venue for 2024. We also considered places that would work for two day-trips and had dinner with friends in St. Andrews.

Next we engaged in family visitation, which involved 33 visits (10 May - 27 June). This year's Scripture passage was Philippians 4.

Lidi Cecilio from Brazil visited from 17 May to 27 July, which dates included the BRF Conference (9-16 July). She stayed with various families in the congregation and participated vibrantly in the fellowship of the church. Mary and I first met Lidi in 2012, when she and four friends were in Dublin studying English. Since then, she has visited us several times and become dear to the CPRC.

Sunday 29 May marked the end of 37 sermons on “Solomon: Israel’s Wisest King” (I Kings 1-11; II Chronicles 1-9), the longest series I have ever preached ([www.cprc.co.uk/old-testament-sermon-series](http://www.cprc.co.uk/old-testament-sermon-series)). Solomon is the last monarch of the united kingdom and he represents the high point in OT Israel. After him comes division, warfare, and temple desecration. Studying Solomon helps us understand Christ’s glorious kingship, (aspects of) the OT ceremonial law, and God’s one holy church, as well as Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and (some of) the Psalms.

Mary and I were finally able to make it to South Wales for a lecture on “The Irresistible Grace of God” on 9 June. Because of covid regulations and the press of other labors, it had been over 28 months since we were last there! We visited the homes of Brian and Sian Harris, and Richard and Judy Holt, and took the three Hutchings out for dinner beforehand. It was lovely to see all of them again and the other saints who attended the lecture.

Mary and I hosted the congregation at the manse for a barbecue (24 June). We had good fellowship and the younger ones enjoyed playing football.

## Translations

In the 139 days since my last letter (18 April), we

added another 79 translations in 8 different languages ([www.cprc.co.uk/languages](http://www.cprc.co.uk/languages)). Almost half of these new translations are Polish (39), most of which are by Marcin Kozera and Robert Jarosz, both of whom were at the BRF conference—the first time that we had met either of them! These Polish translations include two pamphlets by Herman Hoeksema (“The Antichrist” and “The Mark of the Beast”) and the first half of the BRF book, *The Reformed Worldview*, by Profs. Hanko and Engelsma.

This is the breakdown of the remaining 40 new translations: 14 Dutch (including 5 pamphlets by Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof, supplied by Rev. Steve Key in pdfs), 8 Hungarian, 8 Afrikaans, 4 Spanish, 3 Odia (all of the Three Forms of Unity), 2 Russian, and 1 Korean.

We now have articles from the *Covenant Reformed News* translated into 22 different languages spoken in various countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America: Afrikaans, Burmese, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Hiligaynon, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Kirundi, Luo, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swahili, and Tagalog. Most articles of the *News* have been translated into at least one language and some up to as many as seven different tongues. Thus there are many more translations of the *News* online than there are pieces in English!

May the Lord continue to bless and keep you all by His Word and Spirit in these perilous times.

*Rev. Angus and Mary Stewart*

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## BRF Conference Report

On July 9, 2022, a beautiful Saturday afternoon, 105 saints from all over the world gathered at Castlewellan Castle Christian Conference Centre in Northern Ireland for the sixteenth BRF Conference. It had been four long years since the BRF had met. Covid and restrictions in 2020 and 2021 had made it impossible for the conference to be held.

What a beautiful venue! The castle was built in 1856, and its beautiful, original woodwork can be seen throughout. The castle sits on 1,100 acres, overlooking a beautiful lake with a walking path around it. The grounds also contained a beautiful garden, arboretum,

and maze. A short walk to the town of Castlewellan was also possible for necessities and snacks.

Rev. Angus and Mary Stewart and the BRF committee did an amazing job of organizing and keeping the planned events on time. Rev. Stewart’s knowledge of history and dates kept us entertained on the two bus tours.

On Monday we visited Mount Stewart House, a beautiful mansion with a surrounding garden and walking paths. On Wednesday we explored the Dunsink Castle ruins, which were built somewhere around the beginning of the thirteenth century. We also saw a monument of Robert Ross, an Irishman, who report-



edly burnt the U.S. White House down in 1814 during the 1812 war. The Irish are quite fond of this; however, Americans, not so much!

Prof. David Engelsma and Prof. Brian Huizinga were the speakers for the conference. What a timely subject was chosen—Union with Christ.

Rev. Stewart had the welcome and opening speech on Saturday, July 9. He spoke on Psalm 56—the Psalm of Union with God. Prof. Huizinga led our worship services on Sunday. His morning worship sermon was “Our Changeless Jesus Christ” (Heb 13:8) and his evening text was John 1:29—“The Lamb of God Come.”

On Monday Prof. Engelsma addressed the group on our Union with Christ. On Tuesday, Prof. Huizinga addressed us in the morning on Union and Election, and Prof. Engelsma addressed us at night on Union with Christ’s Death. Rev. Stewart addressed the group on Wednesday evening on John Calvin on Union with Christ. Prof. Huizinga addressed us on Thursday evening on Union with Christ’s Resurrection. Prof. Engelsma spoke on Union with Christ and Marriage on Friday morning and Prof. Huizinga gave the last address on Friday evening with the topic of Union and the Antithesis.

What a wonderful week to hear faithful men of God expound to us the meaning of our union with God in Christ! What assurance we have knowing Christ is in us, and we are in Christ. We are one body with many members, dead in sin, and separated from Christ unless He sends His Spirit into our hearts. All of our salvation flows out of God’s will. Because of Christ’s death on

the cross, we are declared righteous. Our old man of sin is crucified with Christ. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The recordings of the speeches are available at [www.britishreformed.org](http://www.britishreformed.org).

The week ended much too soon on Saturday morning July 16.

A special thanks to the saints of the BRF who plan and arrange these conferences. Much time and hard work goes into this.

Saints from Norway, Singapore, Brazil, U.S., Wales, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Australia, and the Philippines attended. What amazing stories we heard from some of them, as they described how the Lord led them to the Reformed faith. We must pray for those who are alone in their Reformed faith in a country that despises Christians.

As this was to be Prof. Engelsma’s last conference, it was a sad parting. He faithfully attended all prior conferences and has many dear friends and saints whom he has grown to love and who love him. It will be very difficult to imagine him not addressing the conference again. We thank him for his faithful and God-honoring speeches. The Lord willing, we welcome Prof. Huizinga and Rev. Ron Hanko as speakers of the next Conference in 2024 to be held in Wales.

Lori Schipper  
(Grandville, MI PRC)



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## Announcements

### Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Tyler and Lisa Koole in the death Tyler's father, **James Koole**, who died at the age of 67. "For whether we live we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

Rev. D. Noorman, President  
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

### Wedding anniversary

Giving thanks to our heavenly Father, we honor and celebrate our parents, **Rodrigo "Dick" and Violeta Espiritu**, as they celebrate on September 14, 2022 their 45th wedding anniversary. The Lord continues to be faithful to our family through many years and we are thankful to Him for God's glory! "For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

\* Roderick

\* Herbert Joseph and Maria Niña  
Hanicka Venice

\* Andrew and Mary Cris

Achaicus Zion, Andrei Jacob

Berean PRC, the Philippines

### Seminary Convocation

Seminary convocation will be held on September 7, at 7:30 P.M., in Trinity PRC. Prof. D. Kuiper will give the address.

### 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.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk

### Reformed Witness Hour

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

#### Rev. C. Haak

September 4—More Than Conquerors

Romans 8:35-37

September 11—Christ's Inseparable Love

Romans 8:38, 39

September 18—The Need for the Recovery  
of the Biblical Gospel (1)

Romans 1:16

September 25—The Need for the Recovery  
of the Biblical Gospel (2)

Romans 1:16

### Annual meeting

The Annual Meeting of the RFPA will take place on September 22, at 7:30 P.M. Miss Joyce Holstege will be the speaker.

### 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. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon's Consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk