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Our Shepherd's provision of rest

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In memoriam: Rev. Bernard J. Woudenberg

Prof. Douglas Kuiper



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A note from the RFPA to *Standard Bearer* subscribers,

Nearly every part of our economy has been affected by inflation, and the RFPA is no different. As a result of increased production and mailing costs, we are increasing yearly subscription rates for the *Standard Bearer*. Beginning on October 1, 2022, subscribers in the U.S. will pay \$33 for a year's subscription, and subscribers outside the U.S. will pay \$46. All of our readers will continue to receive the same high-quality content that has always been found on the pages of the *SB*.

It is worth noting that our Leveled Membership costs are remaining the same. Those of our supporters who are level members receive the *SB* as well as books that we produce throughout the year. We recommend that you join our leveled membership program. Those who join before October 15, 2022 will also receive up to four additional books from our complimentary books catalog as a thank you for signing up. Please visit rfpa.org/pages/membership to learn more. (See the ad at the back of this issue.)



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Meditation

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

Our Shepherd's provision of rest

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Psalm 23:2

The creature is created in such a way that he stands in need of rest. All creatures have that need, including man. In life we are confronted with many things that would make us weary and restless. There are many circumstances that would make it impossible for us to relax and have peace, to experience contentment. How quickly we can be filled with stress, anxiety, and fear.

Sheep require rest too. Sheep, being rather timid, defenseless animals, are easily disturbed. For sheep to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from tension, aggravation, hunger, and fear. Sheep that sense a predator is nearby are unable to rest. Sheep that are beset with friction with others of the flock are not able to lie down. Sheep that are tormented by various pests or parasites cannot rest. Sheep that feel the need of finding food will not lie down.

Only the shepherd can provide relief from these disturbing circumstances. It is actually the shepherd who makes it possible for the sheep to lie down and rest, to relax and be calm, to be quiet and flourishing. And as spiritual sheep, we must never forget that this is also true of us. People may seek rest from many different sources, but the only true rest is provided by our Shepherd, Jehovah, the God of our salvation.

This is the point that the psalmist is making in this familiar verse which is frequently misunderstood. It is thought that this verse speaks mostly concerning the food and drink of the sheep. For we read of “green pastures” and of “still waters.” But, though plenty as regards pasture and drink is implied, the main idea concerns *rest*. Our Shepherd makes us to *lie down* in green pastures. He leads us beside the still waters, literally, beside “waters of *resting places*.” The point then is that our Shepherd, Jehovah God, provides His people with rest.

The psalmist gives us a very graphic picture of what rest is: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Around the world, sheep are often found in rather dry, semi-arid country. Often, because of the scanty pasture available, sheep have to spend considerable time moving

from one spot where there is a little grass to another. By the middle of the day the flock has already covered quite a bit of ground moving about grazing. The sheep are in need of rest. Jacob spoke of this need to Esau in Genesis 33:13, “...the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should over drive them one day, all the flock will die.”

A hungry, ill-fed sheep is always on its feet. A hungry sheep is always on the move. It constantly searches for another mouthful of forage to further satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not content; they do not thrive. They languish, lacking vigor and vitality. They do not find rest.

The secret is for the flock to be able to fill up quickly in the morning hours grazing in the green pastures. Then the sheep could lie down quietly to rest and ruminate. So green pastures are essential for success with sheep. There is no substitute for good pastures. Nothing so satisfies a shepherd as seeing his sheep well fed on rich green forage, able to lie down to rest. That is a picture of complete contentment—sheep lying peacefully in a rich green meadow, eyes nearly closed, chewing slowly on their cud. That is rest!

The parallel thought is very similar, “he leadeth me beside the still waters,” literally, “beside waters of resting places.” Although sheep thrive in dry, semi-arid country, they still require water. To a considerable extent water determines the vitality, strength, and vigor of the sheep. Water is essential to the health and general well-being of the flock. If there is a lack of water, a sheep begins to dehydrate. The animal becomes weak and impoverished. When sheep are thirsty, they become restless and set out in search of water. The shepherd knows where the quiet, deep, pure water is to be found that alone can satisfy, so that the sheep are able to lie down and rest. So, together, these parallel thoughts provide a complete picture of the shepherd's provision of rest for his sheep.

From the perspective of Scripture, rest is entering into the enjoyment of the finished work of God. In God there is rest. He never toils or labors. His work is always eternally perfect and finished. The triune God

enjoys the perfection of His works and lives a life of fellowship within Himself. How amazing it is that God in His love purposed that we should share in His rest! So it was from the beginning in paradise. Following the pattern of creation, man was to labor six days and on the seventh enjoy the rest of fellowship with God. But man fell into sin and refused to enter into God's rest. He chose instead the toil and labor of sin and death. But God spoke of another day. God had provided some better thing for those whom He had chosen in Christ. God had ordained a higher and more glorious rest! Ultimately, it would be the rest of perfect communion with God in Christ in the glory of heaven.

As is already plain, it is absolutely necessary that the shepherd make provision for his sheep to rest. Of themselves sheep are unable to secure rest. It is the shepherd who "maketh me to lie down." It is the shepherd who "leadeth me." Only the shepherd can remove disturbing influences that would prevent the flock from resting. As long as there is even the slightest suspicion of danger from predators, the sheep are on their feet ready to flee. They have little means of self-defense, so that their only recourse is to run. Nothing so quiets and reassures the sheep as to see and know that their shepherd is present. The presence of their shepherd puts them at ease so that they are able to rest.

That is also true for us as sheep. There is no substitute for the keen awareness that our Shepherd is with us. There is nothing like Christ's presence to dispel the anxieties and fears that beset us. For we know that the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Humanly speaking, any hour can bring danger, disaster, and distress. The presence of our Shepherd makes all the difference. We are given peace and are able to rest. The psalmist experienced that in Psalm 4:8, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

The shepherd also delivers his sheep from the tension and cruel rivalry within the flock itself. In virtually every animal society there is an established order of dominance or status within the group. With chickens it is referred to as the "pecking order." Among sheep it is generally a domineering old ewe that will be boss. She maintains her position by driving or butting other ewes and lambs away from her chosen spot. The other sheep similarly establish and maintain their position in the flock. Because of this rivalry and competition, there is tension and friction in a flock. The sheep cannot lie down and rest in contentment. You often have this same sort of situation in human society, and, sad to say, even within the church. There is a struggle for self-assertion and self-recognition. Jealousy arises, and ill will and discontent occur.

In contrast, the picture in this verse shows quiet, peaceful contentment. For sheep, again it is due to the shepherd's presence. When the shepherd attracts the attention of the sheep, they soon forget their foolish rivalries and stop their fighting. Also in the communion of saints, when we are conscious of our Shepherd and His work, our foolish, selfish envy and rivalry will end. It is the humble heart abiding contentedly with Christ that is at rest. With the psalmist we are content to be a door-keeper in the house of God. We confess with Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

In addition, freedom from the torment of insects and parasites is essential to the rest of sheep. Especially in the summer, sheep can be driven nearly crazy by various flies, ticks, and other parasites. When tormented by these pests, it is impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are up on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their heads, milling about, seeking relief.

Only the diligent care of the shepherd will prevent these pests from disturbing his sheep. He will be there to treat the sheep, clearing their fleeces of pests and parasites, enabling them to rest. Likewise, there can be things, people, or circumstances that "bug us," so to speak. Our lives may be beset with irritations, frustrations, and annoyances. But Jehovah our Shepherd cares for us. We cast our cares upon Him and experience rest. So it is that our faithful Shepherd supplies all our needs making full provision for us to rest!

It is in our Lord Jesus Christ that Jehovah our Shepherd realizes our rest. Christ labored as the Head of all of His people that we might enter into the rest of God in the way of His justice and righteousness. Through Christ's suffering and death, through the wonder of His resurrection, through the working of His Spirit, there is rest and peace. In Christ God says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And, by His grace, we hear the voice of our Shepherd. We know Him and follow Him. We enter into His rest.

That Jehovah our Shepherd provides rest is of utmost comfort for us. Principally, we have and experience that rest now. We can testify with the psalmist, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." Through faith, as our spiritual, living union with Christ the Rest-giver, we are principally at rest. And that rest can never be taken away from us. For that rest, both as to its objective accomplishment and its subjective realization, is solely of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But even now that rest is not fully realized. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). That rest will be fully revealed when God's coun-

sel is accomplished, when Christ shall come again and make all things new. We do not yet experience that rest perfectly, for we are not yet in heaven. And sin—our sin—disrupts, and to an extent, spoils our rest. Sin and rest are mutually exclusive. We are yet inclined by nature to go our own foolish ways. We would feed on the barren ground of the wicked world around us. We would drink of the polluted waters of this world. What folly to attempt to find rest and peace apart from our Shepherd! For the result is unrest and misery.

So we are exhorted, as the sheep of God's pasture, "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest" (Heb. 4:11). Let us zealously observe the foretaste of heavenly rest that we have on the Lord's Day. Be ever willing to sacrifice all things earthly for the attainment of the rest provided by our Shepherd! Jesus says, "Come unto me!" Cast your burden upon the Lord; He will have mercy; He will abundantly pardon! Christ's promise to His weary sheep is, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest!"

Editor's notes for Volume 99

Ninety-nine years is a pretty long time, probably longer than any readers of the *Standard Bearer* have lived. If any readers of the *SB* are ninety-nine years old, we would love to hear of it. The Lord has been gracious to enable publication of this magazine this long. If He tarries, may He graciously preserve our writing until He returns.

I like to inform the readers of some interesting facts about our magazine, beginning its 99th year of publication.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) is our magazine's publisher. The RFPA is a society made up of many Reformed men. Through its board of 12 men, the RFPA publishes Reformed books for all ages, maintains an active and full website, and owns the *Standard Bearer*, the magazine you are reading. The relationship between the RFPA (publisher) and the *Standard Bearer* (magazine) is unlike any other we are aware of. Although the RFPA *owns* the magazine, it does not *run* the magazine. Determination of what is written and who writes—normally the prerogative of a publisher—in the *Standard Bearer's* case is made by the staff of the *SB*, not by the RFPA. The staff is comprised of all the writers in the magazine. Although the RFPA could pull the plug on the magazine if the relationship

between them and the *SB* soured, we can report that the relationship is good, with positive input and critique going both ways.

Each year, as many of the staff members as possible meet in person (in recent years, a few have joined by Zoom) to plan the next volume year: Who will write? How often? And what? A smaller committee from the staff recommends answers for these questions for the annual meeting, but the staff itself makes the decisions.

In June, plans were adopted for Volume 99, which volume begins with this issue—October 1.

There are about 19 different types of articles that we call 'rubrics.' These rubrics appear in varying numbers throughout the year, from as often as every issue (editorials, meditations, and usually news), to as few as three or four times per year (for example, articles on church and state). But all categories are important, we think—worth your time to read.

This year we thank all the current writers and put their names in alphabetical order. All 42 of them. Those with an asterisk by their name are new to the staff this year, although some of them have written in the past.

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, S. Dakota
Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh,* Alberta
Mr. Kyle Bruinooge, HS teacher
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, Pittsburgh
Prof. Ronald Cammenga
Rev. Matt DeBoer,* Minnesota
Rev. Nathan Decker, Michigan
Rev. Michael DeVries, Retired, MI
Prof. Russell Dykstra, Michigan
Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Illinois
Rev. Garrett Eriks,* Michigan
Prof. Cory Griess
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Rev. Justin Smidstra, Michigan
Rev. Richard Smit, Philippines
Rev. Audred Spriensma, Indiana
Rev. Clayton Spronk, Michigan
Mr. Charles Terpstra, Registrar
Mr. Brian VanEngen, Attorney

Thank you, men and women, for the time you take to write well.

If any readers know of a good writer in your congregation, do not hesitate to mention it to us so we can put them on our radar for the next planning meeting in 2023. And, as to ideas of topics to write about? Send them, too. We also like to hear from our readers. Our

“Letters” section is open to all who would like to respond to what is written. Please write with charity, and please limit your letter to 600 words.

Finally, thanks to the RFPA society and board for enabling the magazine to go to the ends of the earth. May God be glorified.



Editorial

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

Reporting sexual abuse: If not Matthew 18, then what?

Once more, for the safety of the churches, for the healing of assault victims, and for the repentance of sexual abusers, this editorial treats the subject of reporting sexual abuse. By sexual abuse I am not referring to fornication or adultery between consenting adults, but sexual assault, usually by one in power and authority against a weaker person under their authority and often by an adult against a minor. Writing about “reporting” sexual abuse necessarily spills over into other subjects, especially like helping victims and abusers after reporting has been made. Here, I mostly limit myself to *reporting*.

The last editorial (September 15) pointed out that, although reporting sexual crimes is necessary, it is very difficult for a victim to go to the police, the consistory, or even a trusted friend. It is so difficult that professionals believe most female victims simply keep silent. The struggle for male victims is even greater. That difficulty may not be magnified by advising that Matthew 18 requires them first to confront their abuser alone and, if penitent, be finished with the matter. That application of Matthew 18 was shown to be incorrect and harmful. But for everyone involved, reporting a sexual crime is necessary.

There is no prescribed formula for reporting. There are principles involved but there are no fixed rules that will apply the same in all cases. Dealing with sexual abuse is very difficult. But if we all will be determined that the endeavor will be driven by love, guided by Scripture and God-given wisdom, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can honor God in facing the horrors of sexual abuse.

One article cannot possibly do justice to the subject of how to report. Please read good literature. There is a great deal of it available. I trust that what I write

here reflects both what I have learned from experience, and the wisdom of many counselors (Prov. 11:14) whose books are valuable resources. The special *SB* issue of May 1, 2022 included many recommended resources, although most books do not deal with the difficult subject of how to report assault.

Those who are passionate to confront the evil and help the wounded will always keep in view at least three main categories to guide them when reporting sexual assault: 1) the governing biblical *principles*; 2) all the *parties* involved; 3) and the wise *practices* that will bring honor to God. Principles, parties, and practices. Most important are principles.

Principles

Some of the main biblical principles to govern the process of reporting include justice, mercy, truth, and trust. Those who respond to abuse do well to let these words be on the forefront of their minds throughout their work.

Justice

Start with *justice* because God’s lofty throne “has justice for its cornerstone.” Only after justice can there be “truth and love and boundless grace” (Psalter #242, Psalm 89). The Judge of all the earth does right (Gen. 18:25) and expects His people “to do justice and judgment” (Gen. 18:19). To “do justly” (Mic. 6:8) is to do right according to the law, both of God and man. Justice in sexual abuse cases is to stop the abuser, apply appropriate ecclesiastical discipline and civil punishment (which may include restitution), and help the one harmed.

There is always a temptation to be unjust. So God

warns judges not to pervert the justice due to the poor, not to oppress the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the needy (Ex. 23:6-9). He requires judges not to fear anyone's face, never to take bribes, to hear small and great alike, to acquit the righteous and condemn the wicked (Deut. 25:1). Kings, judges, and all Israelites were bound to this rule. Those who deal with sexual abuse must be very explicit about this first principle both for themselves and sinners. Sin may not be ignored. Act according to the law.

Mercy

Mercy is God's wonderful pity for those who cannot deliver themselves from their misery and His power to deliver them from it. He delights in mercy (Mic. 7:18). Mercy was the first attribute God declared when Moses asked to see Him (Exod. 34:6). "Of mercy and of justice my thankful song shall be..." (Psalter #271) is the testimony of God's people who know Jesus Christ, whose cross and death were the supreme manifestation of both justice and mercy. In the cross is manifested God's steadfast covenant love for His people in distress on account of sin. In Jesus Christ God showed compassion for the suffering, sympathy with the anguish of the helpless and hopeless. In that mercy, God delivers us from our misery and lifts us up to Himself to taste how good He is: "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4). "Grace, *mercy*, and peace be unto you..." Reflecting God, Christians are merciful.

In cases of sexual abuse, everyone is the object of pity, starting with the victims. They have been so damaged that they cannot find deliverance and restoration without very careful treatment and help from outside themselves. Mercy will be patient, gentle, helpful, hopeful, kind, tenderhearted. But because mercy is not only an attitude but also actions, mercy will do everything that is needed to help the victim or find the help they need.

Imagine going to the intensive-care ward of a hospital where lie many family members who were damaged beyond imagination by a drunk driver who hit them head-on. This is not unlike the situation of the victims of abuse. They need both our deep compassion and urgent care to restore them.

Mercy also extends to the abuser, starting with an attitude of pity for those who are enslaved by the devil, completely unable to deliver themselves from their misery. Paul says that a "servant of the Lord" will patiently instruct those who have been captured by the devil (II Tim. 2:24-26). But the only way to begin to show mercy is by holding firmly onto justice. Full accountability is the only way that they can be delivered from their misery. Proverbs 28:13 is important here: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Only

by confessing (fully) *and* forsaking (completely) can he know God's mercy.

Truth

Then there is *truth*. Mercy meets justice only when truth is known and spoken. "Grace and *truth* shall mark the way where the Lord His own will lead" (Psalter #65). Truth in Jesus Christ sets free the people of God (John 8:44).¹ In cases of sexual abuse, there is usually such a long pattern of hiding reality, so many works of the lie, that no one may allow himself to be naïve. One way to avoid being deceived is by reading good literature about the dynamics of this sin, both the damage done to the abused and how it has shaped the abuser's mind and soul.

Trust

Trust is also essential. God is always trustworthy. He keeps His word, does what He says, is what He portrays Himself to be, and will never do or say what is contrary to justice and mercy. We may trust God. "Who put their trust in God Most High on everlasting strength rely" (Psalter #319). Helpers, therefore, laboring on behalf of God, likewise need to be trustworthy—true to their word, doing what they promise, always being what they portray themselves to be.

Trust is vital because, in the very nature of sexual abuse, trust was so horribly betrayed. The abuser used trust to destroy. He said one thing—"I will do you good"—and did unspeakable evil. She portrayed herself as a helper and instead did harm that can hardly be undone. Those who help abused persons must be patient in this regard, too, because the victim's trust in them will not come easily or soon, and may wax and wane in ways that can be disheartening. Be patient. Trust is established through good knowledge, experience, and genuine godliness. How soon do *you* trust someone to tell your deepest secrets?

Parties

Those who help victims of sexual abuse must also be aware of how many different parties are involved, or must become involved, in connection with reporting sexual assault. There are as many as five or six parties that must be kept in view.

We begin with the victim of assault and his/her abuser. That's two. Those to whom the report must be made are both the civil authorities and the ecclesiastical rulers. Three, and four. Not to be forgotten, though, are

¹ From the viewpoint of the victim, "telling truth about sexual assault...is one important aspect of healing." See Justin and Lindsey Holcomb's, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 35.

the families of both the victim and the abuser—spouses, parents, children, siblings. That makes five.

And the sixth party likely involved is a ‘helper,’ one to whom the victim of assault first told his/her story. This may be a pastor or teacher, in which case the civil laws require immediate reporting to the proper agency—the police or child protective services. The helper may be a parent or sibling or friend, in which case the civil law does not mandate reporting to the authorities but love for the victim does. Or the helper may be one who has experience in caring for victims of assault, understands pitfalls, and is able to direct the victim to the many resources available—legal, spiritual, and physical.

All the parties involved are well served by keeping in view all the other parties, so that they can work together—at the least not work at cross-purposes. All are committed to doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. And the more able we are to speak to and work with one another, the more God will be honored by our work. We are servants all. I have spoken to police officers, both when I called them and when they—with Christian concern—have called me. I have spoken to detectives and was treated courteously. Contact between consistory and families is vital. And communication between one consistory where the victim is a member and another consistory where the accused is a member—even when this may be a different denomination—ought to be a given. Speaking the truth in love is the way of God’s blessing our efforts. Above all, we must keep constant and regular communication open with the victims so that they never wonder what is happening.

Practice

To all victims of sexual assault: I pray that you will find someone you can trust to hear you carefully and then take the actions that are appropriate for you when you are ready to report. If at first you cannot find a suitable helper, continue to pray that the Lord would lead you to one who can help. You do not need to feel alone or solely responsible for bringing your story to all who need to know. The Lord will provide, often through other Christians. There are agencies who know how to advise victims. And there is Haven of Mercy, a newly formed group of Protestant Reformed believers who are committed to provide assistance to victims of sexual abuse.² In your distress, look to God, for “in all your affliction He was afflicted;” the angel of His presence will save you; in His love and pity He redeemed you; He carries you all your days (see Is. 63:9).

To all helpers: Heartiest thanks for your desire to as-

sist! May God give you the grace needed to bless the oppressed. Be wise in your help. Encourage the downcast. Use God’s Word, but first listen carefully and kindly. First feed yourself from the Word, so that you are able properly to edify your wounded friend. Remember that in *many* counselors there is wisdom, especially in the difficult matter of sexual abuse. With the knowledge of the victim, seek advice from another wise Christian. Be prepared to work with consistories and civil authorities. But be prepared to *work*, for this work can be overwhelming, except for God’s grace. Know your limits, for this work can be unimaginably heavy. But “I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish [instruct, or counsel] one another” (Rom. 15:14).

To all consistories: Your care for victims and abusers will be some of the most difficult work you have ever done. The complexities abound. Pray for wisdom. Be educated. Many of you are making specific plans how to receive reports of sexual abuse. Be informed of the civil laws and be guided by biblical principles. But remember that each case is different and requires its own plan and actions. Be wary of bits of worldly advice that sometimes spill over into counsel given to churches. Judge not rashly or unheard. With victims, be gentle. Treat them as you would your own son or daughter. In all things be just, merciful, men of truth and courage, seeking always to glorify God by your protection of the damaged sheep and your correction (or, may God forbid, cutting off) of the sinner. “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked” (Ps. 82:3-4).

To family members: May God give you grace to endure this trial. It is a deep and dark path you must walk now, and perhaps for a long time. God’s people will not judge you for what your family member has endured or has inflicted on another. Hold fast to Christ, whose ancestors included many guilty of sexual sins: harlots (Josh. 2:1), solicitors of prostitutes (Gen. 38), and murderous rapists (II Sam. 11). He is not unacquainted with humiliation and disgrace. Shame covered His face, too (Ps. 69:7). He’s a sympathetic Savior.

To the sinners who have assaulted others: Hide no longer. You need help. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. He is full of mercy. The misery of being exposed is nothing compared to your misery remaining in impenitence. Where will this end? “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Is. 55:7). Report yourself.

2 Contact them at havenofmercypr@gmail.com.

And to sinners who have not yet assaulted another but are careless with sexual sins: If you do not put away your sin of feeding your sexual lusts, you may fall into the sin of murder—the criminal sexual assault of another person. It would be better that a millstone was hung about your neck and cast into the sea. Seek help of your elders. They want to guide you. And never imagine that you are strong enough to resist the last step, because “many strong men have been slain by her,” the “strange woman” of sexual sin. Her house is the way to death and hell. Read all of Proverbs 7.

Sexual sin is so ugly, unspeakably ugly, and so shameful we would rather let it be unspoken. May the speaking of it lead us to the cross. There our Lord satisfied God’s justice, manifested mercy, and paid for sin, so that all who trust in Him may find pardon. He is gracious and full of kind compassion.

Broken, humbled to the dust
By Thy wrath and judgment just,
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear Thy voice;
From my sins O hide Thy face,
Blot them out in boundless grace.

(Psalter #140, stanza 4)



A word fitly spoken

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

Meekness

Meekness. It’s a quality that the world disdainfully considers weakness. Sadly, a similar disdain for it can crop up in the church too, if meekness is looked at with a carnal eye rather than the eye of faith. The meek, the flesh says, are pushovers, doormats, wobbly-kneed, double-minded compromisers. The meek, Christ says, are blessed, for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). And the Bible says more: the meek “shall eat and be satisfied” (Ps. 22:26). “The meek” God will “guide in judgment” and “teach his way” (Ps. 25:9). Jehovah arises “to save all the meek of the earth” (Ps. 76:9). His anger burns against transgressors who “turn aside the way of the meek.” Jehovah “lifteth up the meek: He casteth the wicked down to the ground” (Ps. 147:6). The Lord “will beautify the meek with salvation” (Ps. 149:4), and the meek “shall increase their joy in the Lord” (Is. 29:19).

What is this meekness in which our God evidently delights? The Bible connects meekness with humility, gentleness. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to loving forbearance, “with all lowliness and meekness” (Eph. 4:2). Paul beseeches the Corinthians “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (II Cor. 10:1). Meekness can be described as a spiritual-minded gentleness and mildness that flows from deep humility before God. The humble man knows God. And He knows himself in relation to God. “I am the chief of sinners” he says, “and a creature of dust besides.” The humble man lowers him-

self beneath the lofty God and His almighty hand. He knows his unworthiness of any blessing of God apart from Christ. He esteems himself beneath his neighbor too, and conducts himself accordingly.

Moses, Numbers 12:3 tells us, “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Yet meeker than Moses is our Lord Jesus Christ. He embodied meekness perfectly. He is *the* King, yet He came “meek, and sitting upon an ass” (Matt. 21:5). The Lord of glory took upon Himself the form of a servant. He humbled Himself to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:7-8). Jesus’ incarnation, Jesus’ self-giving labor as the sin-bearing suffering Servant of Jehovah, is the supreme demonstration of humility and meekness. The meek Savior calls, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:28-29). What comfort the meekness of our Lord gives us! He is not harsh, but gentle. He is not hard, but compassionate towards us. His meekness gives us rest.

It is Christ’s will that we be meek as He is. “Seek meekness” (Zeph. 2:3). “Put on...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col. 3:12). “Be gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men” (Tit. 3:2). Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit of Christ (Gal. 5:23), planted and cultivated in the heart by grace, and made to blossom in every area of the believ-

er's sanctified life. Far from being weakness, meekness is inner strength. True wisdom shows itself in meekness (James. 3:13). Meekness shows itself in receiving and submitting to the Word of God (James. 1:21).

Meekness in action is the opposite of pride. The proud are haughty and harsh, looking down on the neighbor; the meek are gentle and mild, esteeming others better than themselves (Phil. 2:3). The proud have contempt for the weak and the lost; the meek are eager to give an answer to all who ask a reason for their hope (I Pet. 3:15). The proud expect to be served; the meek bend down to serve, just as their Master did (John 13:14). The proud coddle their egos and heed no rebuke; the meek hear rebuke with grace and return no evil in kind. The proud admit no wrong; the meek humbly confess their sins to God and one another. The proud grab their fellow debtors by the throat, "*Pay me that thou owest*" (Matt. 18:28)! But the meek forgive from a grateful heart, knowing they have been forgiven much. Pride sanctimoniously masks itself as zeal for the truth, and self-righteousness as zeal for holiness; but meekness refuses to wear any mask. In lowliness of mind, before God and men, the meek confess, "I am only a sinner

saved by grace in Christ." Meekness lacks the bombast that impresses men. But meekness is truly *Christ-like*.

No surprise, then, that for officebearers, representatives of Christ, meekness is indispensable. Paul instructs the young pastor Timothy that "the servant of the Lord must not strive." Rather, in all his labor among the sheep, he must be "gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in *meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves" (II Tim. 2:24-25). When fighting the good fight of faith, the believer must not fight like the world. When contending for the faith, the soldier of Christ must still "show all meekness to all men." "Folly!" men will say. But that is part of the wonder of the cross!

Through meekness the Captain of our salvation conquered the foe! When He was reviled, He reviled not again (I Pet. 2:23). He yielded Himself to the death of the cross. In this glorious meekness He brought to bear the mightiest power. In dying He said, "It is finished." Meekly bowing His head, giving up the ghost, commending His spirit, He accomplished our salvation. So that we, His beloved, the meek—made so by grace—"shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11).



Taking heed to the doctrine

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Antinomians? Without a doubt (3)

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2022, p. 469.

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

Proverbs 24:17-18

Introduction

According to Acts 5:31, God has exalted Jesus Christ to be a Prince and Savior, "for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Take note of the order. Repentance is first, followed by forgiveness of sins. This is God's order in saving sinners.

In the previous article, we examined what the Three Forms of Unity have to say about the relation between forgiveness and repentance. We saw that our Reformed

confessions teach that God's forgiveness always follows the believer's repentance. God forgives those who repent. To put it differently, in the way of repentance God forgives sin. As Canon V.7 teaches, when the elect fall into sin God always "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." On the part of the elect, "sincere and godly sorrow for their sins" precedes "seek[ing] and obtain[ing] remission" of their sins and "again experienc[ing] the favor of a reconciled God."

That which the Three Forms of Unity teach concerning the relation between forgiveness and repentance is

corroborated by other of the Reformed confessions. As might be expected, the broader body of Reformed confessions is consistent with itself—a seamless robe woven of a common gospel thread.

Westminster Standards

Chapter 11 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) is entitled “Of Justification.” Paragraph five reads: “God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.” By their sins believers may “fall under God’s fatherly displeasure.” Not until they confess their sins and “renew their faith and repentance,” is “the light of [God’s] countenance restored unto them.” Once again, in the way of repentance God forgives sin.

The WCF addresses the relation between forgiveness and repentance especially in chapter 15, “Of Repentance unto Life.” In one way or another, every paragraph of the chapter speaks to the relation. Paragraph 2 teaches that the elect sinner “upon the apprehension of [God’s] mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.” Noteworthy is the resolve of the repentant sinner to turn from his sins in order to walk *with God* in the way of His commandments—a beautiful, covenantal description of sanctification. But what is also of significance is the paragraph’s statement concerning God’s mercy “to such as are penitent.” Obviously, God’s mercy to the penitent is His mercy shown in forgiving their sins.

Of special interest is paragraph 3: “Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God’s free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.” Although repentance does not merit forgiveness, there is no forgiveness apart from repentance: “none may expect pardon without it.” Only those who are truly repentant—sorry for their sins—experience God’s pardon. This the preacher of the gospel must make clear without being intimidated by those who may charge him with maintaining conditional theology. In our lawless age, let the faithful preacher not fear the faces of men, but boldly issue the call to repentance, making its necessity abundantly clear and warning “that none may expect pardon without it.”

Paragraph 4 goes on to affirm that “there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.” That is negative. Put positively, “those who truly repent” have their sins forgiven and, rather than suffer damnation, are promised the joy of entering into the everlasting glory of heaven. Whoever truly repents of his sins is assured by God Himself in the preaching of the gospel that his sins, however great, are forgiven. To such forgiven sinners God promises everlasting life.

The last paragraph of WCF (chap. 15) deals with the private and public confession of sin in the church. This paragraph, too, is instructive regarding the relation between forgiveness and repentance. As every sinner is called to make “confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof,” so “he that scandalizeth his brother, or the church of Christ ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him.” The penitent sinner ought to be willing “to declare his repentance” to those against whom he has sinned. In that way, they are to be reconciled to him and receive him. The sinner’s repentance and confession of sin are the way to reconciliation between the sinner and those whom he has offended. Apart from repentance and confession, there cannot be reconciliation. The paragraph presumes that this is the way in which church members ought to deal with each other because this is the way in which God deals with us. The sinner is reconciled with God in the way of repentance and confession.

There can be no question as to the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the relation between forgiveness and repentance. No one who deals honestly with these confessional standards can escape their clear witness: God forgives sins after and in the way of repentance. Anyone who reads and studies the Reformed confessions can come to no other conclusion.

Adding their voices

Besides the two great confessional traditions, the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, other lesser-known confessions voice their support on the relation between forgiveness and repentance.

Chapter 14 of the Second Helvetic Confession is entitled “Of Repentance and the Conversion of Man.” The chapter begins: “The doctrine of repentance is joined with the Gospel. For so has the Lord said in the Gospel: ‘Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in my name to all nations’ (Luke 24:27).” In the second paragraph, the SHC goes on to say that they who are truly repentant are “accepted by God into grace.” In the third

paragraph, Heinrich Bullinger, the author of the SHC, quotes Psalm 32:5. His translation makes plain his view: “I acknowledged my sin to thee, and did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’; *then* thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.” Bullinger’s translation is faithful to the Hebrew original.

A bit later in the same chapter, Bullinger teaches that faithful pastors are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. In this capacity, they are called to “persuade men to believe and repent. Thus they reconcile men to God.” “Remission of sins in the blood of Christ is to be diligently proclaimed” by the faithful preacher of the gospel, and “each one [who believes] is to be admonished that the forgiveness of sins pertains to him.” In this way, “they [preachers] remit sins...open the Kingdom of Heaven, and bring believers into it.”

One of the lesser-known confessions is The Irish Articles (1615). In his introduction to them, James T. Dennison Jr. says that “[i]t cannot be doubted that the articles had a formative influence on the Westminster divines and their Standards.”¹ In paragraph 74, The Irish Articles express the calling of faithful ministers of the gospel “to declare and pronounce unto such as truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy gospel, the absolution and forgiveness of sins.” Repentance precedes “the absolution and forgiveness of sins.”

An early haven for persecuted Reformed believers in Europe was Emden in the Lowlands. Church historians have referred to it as the “Geneva of the Netherlands” because of the number of refugees who fled to the protection of her walls. The Polish Reformer, John à Lasco (1499-1560), was persuaded to take up residence in Emden and as a result he made an enduring impact on the Dutch Reformed churches. Eventually à Lasco’s congregation crossed the channel and he with them took up residence in London.

John à Lasco is the author of The Emden Catechism (1554). Besides the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, the catechism treats the articles of the Apostles’ Creed. Concerning Article 10 of the Apostles’ Creed, Question 48 asks, “What do you confess in the article regarding the forgiveness of sins?” The answer is: “I believe that in the church of Christ there is true and eternal forgiveness of sins for those who repent and believe—all this solely and purely out of grace through the only Mediator, Jesus Christ, our Lord.”² For those who repent and believe there is forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness

follows repentance and faith. Those who are sorry for their sins and believe on Jesus Christ are blessed with the forgiveness of their sins.

Conclusion

To teach that forgiveness precedes repentance is historically antinomian. It arises out of the fear that to say repentance takes place prior to forgiveness is to make God dependent on man. At best it is a misunderstanding of the truth, at worst it is the deliberate distortion of it. The misunderstanding or distortion is that repentance is made a work of man. Certainly if repentance is a work of man, having its source and origin in man, is accomplished by man, whether aided by the grace of God or not, God becomes dependent on man. And salvation becomes conditional, contingent on the will and work of the sinner—in this case, the will and work of man to repent.

But this is not the Reformed and biblical view of repentance. God gives repentance, according to Acts 5:31, and God grants repentance unto life, according to Acts 11:18. God works sorrow over sin, but in such a way that we are sorry for our sins. God works repentance, but in such a way that we cry out to God for the forgiveness of our sins. God works in us, but in such a way that we will and do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). God works in us consistent with the kind of creatures that He has made us. He has made us rational, moral (thinking, willing) creatures. Therefore, “this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties.” Rather, it “spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends [our will]; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign” (Canons III/IV.16). “Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received.”

“The manner of this operation cannot be fully comprehended by believers in this life. Notwithstanding which, they rest satisfied with knowing and experiencing that by this grace of God they are enabled to believe with the heart, and love their Savior” (Canons III/IV.13). Thus, conversion “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, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light” (Canons III/

1 James T. Dennison Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 4, 1600-1693* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 89.

2 Dennison, 2:66.

IV.10).

Next time, we will look at what John Calvin has to say about the relation between forgiveness and repentance, after which we will turn to the founding fathers

of the PRC. Then on to error #2 on account of which the RPC ministers and members justly deserve to be classified as antinomians.



I believe

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What is gender dysphoria and its common expressions?

Introduction

Hello everyone, this is Jane. Ze's a senior here [not a typo, pronounced zee], and will be taking you on your campus tour today. Let's all welcome hir [not a typo, pronounced heer] as your tour guide!¹

We have a new waiter joining our team tonight. Sam could you introduce yourself and give us your pronouns? Hi! My name is Sam...used to be Sheila. My pronouns are he/him, and I am excited to be working here.

Mom?—tugging on shirt—why does it seem like that lady has to shave?²

The children and youth of the church are growing up in a world that is in many ways foreign to that of their parents and grandparents. Sexual perversion has blossomed from “free love” to homosexual expression to a complete rejection of God's created design for gender. As a result, parents wonder sometimes how to guide their children. Meanwhile, youth wonder if any adults in the church understand what they are encountering. Both

adults and youth have questions. The parents perhaps more easily dismiss their own questions even if they do not possess comprehensive answers. They are settled in their convictions and transgender issues were not ‘a thing’ when they were discovering the world around them. “First there was the legalization of homosexual marriage, now this? I know it's wrong, and that's all I need to know.”

Some young people and young adults in the kingdom of Christ perhaps have questions with greater personal potency. They will likely come face to face with gender issues more often as they are coming of age, perhaps in personal acquaintance, propaganda heard in a college classroom, work training sessions, and certainly through the myriad of media available to them. These cannot easily dismiss it and move on. On the contrary, they work next to transgender people or sit in class and dialogue with others who affirm these confused ideas of sexuality. The questions persist—“Why do people do this? Does God create people with a man's mind in a woman's body (or vice versa)? What does the Bible say about this? Is gender socially constructed?” And maybe even, “What do I say to this friend and fellow church member who confesses to me *she* sometimes feels like *she* is a *he*?” Or perhaps even, “I sometimes feel like, though I am a *he*, I am a *she*. What do I do with these feelings?”

The purpose of these articles is *especially* to help the young adults of the church as they face these kinds of challenges. When I was in college, the cultural-moral revolution had not come to expression as concretely as it has now, and yet already then I was taught repeatedly in my education courses that gender is an entirely subjective construct arbitrarily manufactured by religion and cultural assumptions totally apart from any objective basis. My generation was by no means the first to

1 Ze is supposed to be the gender-neutral subjective third person singular pronoun, and hir the gender-neutral objective third person singular pronoun. Astoundingly, in New York City you can be fined up to \$250,000 for intentionally not using someone's preferred pronouns. Eugene Volokh, “You Can be Fined for not Calling People ‘ze’ or ‘hir,’ if that's the Pronoun they Demand that you Use,” *Washington Post*, May 17, 2016 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/05/17/you-can-be-fined-for-not-calling-people-ze-or-hir-if-thats-the-pronoun-they-demand-that-you-use/>).

2 To be clear, cross-dressing and transgressim are not the same thing. There are people who cross-dress who do not claim to be the other gender and who do not have feelings out of accord with their sex. Some of these cross-dress for example, to instigate a perverted eroticism. Nonetheless, there are people who cross-dress as a form of transgender behavior.

be taught these ideas in the university setting. In fact, what we are seeing today has been a long time coming, though its present reality is still hard to fathom.

However, these articles are not *only* for the young adults. *Many* of us have questions, young and old. Parents desire to help guide their children through their young-adult years. And many of us will have contact with people who present themselves as a gender they are not. Sadly, this issue will touch all in one way or another.

As we will see, for some their expressions of themselves as an opposite gender from their natural biology traces back to something now termed “gender dysphoria.” Upon this real and difficult experience for a small fraction of people an entire revolution against the God-created order is being built. Investigating these matters in this series of articles, we will have to answer four main questions. First, What? What is gender dysphoria and its expressions? Next, Why? Why do gender dysphoria and its expressions exist? Then, third, Lord willing, we will ask, What is being done about it in society?, and, What is Scripture’s answer? Finally, I would like to take a step back so we can see the broader movement that the gender revolution is a part of.

This reading will not necessarily be easy, especially at first. There are some complex things through which we must wade. But I do not think a simplistic discussion will be of long-term help to the church. Thankfully, with Scripture in hand we have the beacon of light we need to pierce through the dark complexity and to give the clear answers we need.

1.1. Defining the terms

Perhaps the new waiter where you have recently found a job begins telling you her story:

I can remember at four years old already liking things that boys do. When I was eight, I told my mom I was a boy even though they named me Sheila. My mom was super supportive and began to dress me in boys’ clothes and call me Sam. Sam was her idea. It was hard because at first the teachers at school did not want to go along with it, but my mom really laid into them. When she gave them the report from the gender clinic, the teachers embraced me for who I really am and called me Sam at school. At age eleven the doctors started me on puberty blockers to stop my body from developing into an adult woman. When I was fourteen, they started giving me testosterone shots too. I didn’t really need ‘top’ surgery. But I am still trying to decide about ‘bottom’ surgery. It’s hard. Sometimes I feel great. Other times I feel really

depressed. To be honest, I have tried to kill myself a few times, but I’m still here!

The experience of your co-worker feeling like she is male, though her body is female, has been labeled “gender dysphoria” by the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*.³ The DSM-5 is the authoritative standard used by doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other professionals regarding mental health issues. The DSM-5 manual uses the term “gender dysphoria” to describe the feeling of being a different gender from one’s sex. You have likely heard of it, as it has come down from the manual into common language. The term “dysphoria” in gender dysphoria refers to a profound sense of unease or dissatisfaction. It is the opposite of *euphoria*, a profound sense of happiness or pleasure. According to DSM-5, *gender dysphoria* then, is a profound sense of unease or dissatisfaction with the gender one has been told he/she is.

The significant difference between DSM-IV and DSM-5

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* used to describe this feeling as a “gender identity disorder.”⁴ This was a better term than “gender dysphoria.”⁵ But in 2013 the American Psychiatric Association, which produces the DSM, made the change to “gender dysphoria.” The change is significant and telling.⁶ The label “gender identity disorder” indicated the issue concerned the way someone was *identifying themselves* (gender *identity* disorder).⁷ In addition, significantly, the struggle with how someone was identifying him/herself was termed a *disorder* (“gender identity *disorder*”). The manual communicated that people were identifying themselves

3 American Psychiatric Association and American Psychiatric Association, eds., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th ed (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 451. From here on I will identify this manual simply as DSM-5.

4 American Psychiatric Association, ed., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV ; Includes ICD-9-CM Codes Effective 1. Oct. 96*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C., 1998), 532. From here on, I will identify this manual simply as DSM-IV.

5 DSM-IV also uses the term “gender dysphoria” but it does not use that term to *label* the disorder, as DSM-5 does. DSM-5 purposefully drops the label “gender identity disorder.” See footnote 6.

6 The DSM-5 manual itself states, “The current term [gender dysphoria] is more descriptive than the previous DSM-IV term gender identity disorder and focuses on dysphoria as the clinical problem, not identity per se” (451).

7 Gender Identification Disorder was defined by DSM-IV as a strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex) (DSM-IV, 532-533).

in a way that is out of accord with a standard. Hence, their identity was “dis-ordered.” That *standard* was the person’s biological sex. There was, therefore, a certain judgment being made in the term “gender identity disorder,” namely, that something is wrong with the way the person is identifying himself/herself. One is identifying oneself contrary to order.

With the new label “gender dysphoria,” the issue is no longer with the way one is identifying oneself. The issue is only that one does not *feel well* regarding one’s gender. As well, the new label does not seek to make any judgment about the feelings. It is no longer a disorder. The label simply describes the feeling some people have.⁸

With this trajectory, one wonders if in the future, the same thing will happen to gender identity disorder that happened to homosexuality. Homosexuality used to have a place in the *DSM*. However, in 1973 professionals removed it altogether because society determined it was something to be celebrated, not an aberration. The likelihood of this happening in due time with gender identity disorder, now gender dysphoria, is great.

Though the *label* “gender dysphoria” makes no judgment regarding the feelings of gender incongruence, the *definition* in *DSM-5* makes a strong judgment on the feelings of gender incongruence. The judgment is not sound. The *DSM-5* defines gender dysphoria (in children now) as “a marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, lasting at least 6 months as manifested by at least six of the following...” (we will get to these next time). Again, (this time with emphasis) “an incongruence between one’s *experienced/expressed gender*, and one’s *assigned gender*.”⁹ If the author’s only purpose in speaking of “assigned gender” was to make allowance for a tiny part of the population with what is called “intersex condition,” one could understand. Individuals with intersex condition do need to be “assigned” a gender (a future article). Yet, the definition slyly lumps all human beings into the category of having their gender subjectively *assigned* to them at birth. This is telling. The manual communicates that while the vast majority of the population have male or female genitalia when they come out of the womb, this reality does not determine gender, because gender itself is subjective. Adults may have *assigned* a gender to a newborn baby, but that baby may grow to

express a different gender. In fact, *DSM-5* teaches that gender is determined by what a person *feels* himself/herself to be. Furthermore, some people feel dysphoria as they mature, not because *they* are experiencing a disorder, but because the doctors and parents who naively thought that sex determined gender have a disorder! Whereas before the psychiatric community agreed one’s gender is assigned by God in the womb and is the same as one’s biological sex, now they are saying gender and sex are not the same.

The effect of the changing understanding

This fundamental break between sex and gender has opened the floodgates to what we see happening in society today.¹⁰ Now, because people view gender as entirely subjective, they believe their feelings give them the right to say they are boys when in fact they are girls, or girls when they are boys. What is more, since gender is entirely subjective, no longer are people limited to declaring themselves boys in a girl’s body, or girls in a boy’s body, but they may declare themselves to be many different things. A person may be neither a girl nor a boy, or part girl and part boy. A person may be a new gender no one as ever heard of yet. A person may in fact be not a person at all but instead an animal trapped inside a human body.¹¹ These individuals will argue for so-called “genderfluidity” or “genderqueer” identity extending beyond a binary (male/female) understanding of gender. According to them, there is a seemingly endless array of gender variations one can feel, and one’s gender or gender mixture may change many times—as often as the feelings change. Facebook used to give 71 options of genders to choose from, but as people created more and more ‘genders,’ it could not keep up. Facebook had to resort to simply letting you type in your own gender.

The argument reflected in the definition *DSM-5* gives is that the presence of feelings of gender dysphoria in some people proves that gender and sex are not to be united to each other. If some people feel different from what their bodies are, and that feeling is dysphoric to them, we can know the body is no standard for what a person’s gender identity is or ought to be. Digging deeper, the foundational belief is this: how one *feels* is more

8 See the explanation of the American Psychiatric Association here: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-patients/gender-dysphoria-diagnosis>

9 *DSM-5*, 452.

10 The *DSM-5* itself opens this door: “*Gender identity* is a category of social identity and refers to an individual’s identification as male, female, or, occasionally, some category other than male or female” (451).

11 Hannah Frishberg, “I’m a real-life furry and my lifestyle is no dirty ‘cat litter box’ joke,” *New York Post*, January 27, 2022 (<https://nypost.com/2022/01/27/im-a-real-life-furry-and-my-lifestyle-is-no-litter-box-joke>).

fundamental to identity than *physical reality*. Thus, one ought to strive (even to the point of taking the knife to the body) to change one's body to match feelings. So committed is society to this notion, that now various places are allowing people to change their *birth certificate* to reflect, not their biology, but how they feel about their gender.¹²

Some terms to remember

People with feelings of gender dysphoria are encouraged by the culture to express outwardly whatever gender they feel they are. If an individual decides to do so in any way, that individual is called “transgender.” So, gender dysphoria is a distressing feeling of being different from what one's body tells one (or what gender one's

parents or doctor assigned on the basis of that body). Meanwhile, “transgender” is *accepting* the errant desire in some way as good and right and fundamentally true, so that one now identifies oneself by those feelings. Of course, this begins as a commitment in one's own mind. Instead of saying, “I am not what these feelings are telling me,” the transgender individual says, “I am what these feelings are telling me, and my body is wrong.” The one who does this in his/her mind often begins to change their outward appearance. Those who go so far as to get a sex-change operation to change how they look are called “transsexual.”

I am going to use the terms “transsexual,” “transgender,” and even “gender dysphoria” in my writing. But understand, I will not be adopting the definition of it given by *DSM-5*. As far as a description of the feeling goes, it is accurate. There is a feeling of dysphoria with regard to one's gender. However, the question is, Why? and What to do about it? Our answer to *that* will be much different from what is given by *DSM-5*.

12 Tyler O'Neil, “Ohio Lets the Trans Agenda Override Biological Sex on Birth Certificates,” *P.J. Media*, April 28, 2021 (<https://pjmedia.com/news-and-politics/tyler-o-neil/2021/04/28/ohio-lets-the-trans-agenda-override-biological-sex-on-birth-certificates-n1443401>).



Go ye into all the world

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

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (9)

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2022, p. 302.

At the end of the previous article in this series, we mentioned that the goal of the three-self formula for an indigenous church is Christian. Thereby, it was asserted that a healthy, indigenous church institute that is self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing manifests consistently that she is a prophetic, priestly, and royal institution of Jesus Christ in the earth.

This assertion, that the local church institute has been ordained by Christ as His royal priesthood that proclaims His wonderful works, is supported by Scripture when it describes the church as “...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (I Pet. 2:9). This beautiful description applies not only to the church as the spiritual body of Christ, but also to her as she becomes manifest in the local church institute.

That the local church institute is a gathering of the

prophesying royal priesthood who submits to and loves the Word of Christ is evident from the Belgic Confession of Faith. According to Article 27, the church institute is a *royal* institution: the kingdom of her eternal King, the Lord Jesus. According to Article 30, the church institute is a prophesying royal priesthood. The article describes the church as that *prophetic* institution which, through its pastors, preaches the Word of God so that “...the true religion may be preserved and the true doctrine everywhere propagated.” The church is described as that *priestly* institution which, through her deacons, labors in thankful devotion so that “...also the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities.” Finally, the church is described as that *royal* institution which, through her elders, labors so that “transgressors are punished and restrained by spiritual means.”

On the basis of holy Scripture, we understand, first, that the local church institute has been given the author-

ity of Christ and the *prophetic duty* to preach the Word of God. (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8). She has been given the authority of Christ and the work to administer the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19; Matt. 26:26-30; I Cor. 11:23-34). Secondly, we understand that the local church institute has been given the authority of Christ for the *priestly duty* of the administration of the mercies of Christ with regard to the poor and needy (Acts 2:45; Acts 4:34-35; Rom. 12:8,13; I Cor. 12:28; II Cor. 8 and 9). Finally, we understand that the local church institute has been given the authority of Christ for the *royal duty* of the administration of Christian discipline and of oversight of the confession and life of the members of the church (Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:4-5; II Thess. 3: 14-15; I Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10; III John 9-10).

Moreover, holy Scripture reveals that Christ, the Head of the church, has ordained in the church institute specific church offices for the carrying out of her prophetic, priestly, and royal task in the name of Christ and within His Word. The church fulfills her Christian task through the men whom God graciously provides and whom she ordains according to the qualifications and order that the Word of God sets forth (Acts 6:3; I Tim. 3:1-13; I Tim. 4:12-16).

Her prophetic duty of the administration of the Word and the sacraments is fulfilled by men ordained into the ministry of the Word (II Tim. 1:6-7; 4:1-4). Her priestly duty of the administration of the mercies of Christ, both in their diligent collection and their compassionate distribution to those in need, is discharged by men ordained as deacons (Acts 6:1ff.; I Tim. 3:8-13). Her royal duty of the administration of Christian discipline and the oversight of the church is fulfilled by men who are ordained as elders (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:1-4).

When we consider the concept of the three-self formula as it corresponds to the office of Christ and the special offices in the church institute, and when we consider how it has been described and defined in Reformed churches according to the historical examples provided in earlier articles, we conclude that it is a biblical and Reformed concept.

According, then, to our Reformed understanding of the structure of the instituted, local church, we should now make clear that the word "self" in the three-self formula does not permit the local church to fulfill her duties in selfish or self-serving ways.

First, "self" does not prescribe for the local church, or her federation, a hierarchical structure. The church is not structured as a pyramid with the highest human individual in authority at the top exercising his authority through many layers and ranks of subordinate rulers. The church

herself propagates, supports, and governs in her labors under Christ, her Head, as a prophetic royal priesthood and carries out her official mandate through co-equal servants in the service of Jesus Christ unto His church.

Second, "self" does not allow the local church to abdicate her responsibilities and duties in order for the more resourceful neighboring church or foreign denomination to take up, in whole or in part, those local duties. A small and fledgling local church of little manpower and few finances may very well be tempted to think that a neighboring congregation or a foreign denomination, who has abundant manpower and money, can easily take over her own local responsibilities and duties. When leaders and members of such a church allow the neighboring church or foreign denomination to take over the responsibility of propagation, support, and government, the results are destructive and eventually fatal to the liveliness and faithfulness of the local church. For it is her calling to develop the submission, contentment, enthusiasm, delight, initiative, diligence, and endurance to preach the Word faithfully, to sacrifice the firstfruits of her weekly income for the support of the church and the poor under her care, and to oversee the preaching and the confession and conduct of believers and their seed in the congregation or in a mission station. However, faithful to her threefold task, the church will be effective with her own means and within her own social, spiritual, economic, cultural, and geographical context.

Third, "self" does not mean that the church fulfills her threefold task as a democracy. It is a temptation to have the church ruled by the individual believers through a majority vote on various cases and issues of preaching, evangelism, missions, sacraments, discipline, membership, ministerial support, and benevolence. This view maintains that the authority and execution of the work of the church rests in the rights of the individual Christian believer. However, this view that the church institute must function like a democracy denies the fact that she is a theocracy, ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ, her eternal King, under whose headship the officebearers in the church are only servants who must implement His Word, and who will do so within the boundaries of their specific church offices.

Fourth, and similar to the first error, "self" does mean that the local church may let herself be ruled, taught, and supported by one or a few members. There may be some wealthy, highly educated, and attractively charismatic pastors and elders in a church. Nevertheless, the three-self formula does not allow for a pastor or an elder to function in and direct all three offices of that church. Nor, does it allow a gifted pastor or elder

to control and to decide almost everything in his church. Having the church operated by one man, or a few, can easily happen in a local church institute. Pastors, or even elders, who have been well educated with a college and a seminary education, might expect, or even proudly demand, that other officebearers and members of his church, who might be far less educated, must always listen and do whatever they teach without any questions.

The antidote to this erroneous view of “self” in the three-self formula is, first, that the offices of the church must be viewed co-equally, according to Article 84 of the Church Order. Moreover, faithful service in the offices in the church must follow the humble example of Christ in which He washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17). Greatness in the church and kingdom of God is not to rule but to serve (Mark 10:42-45). Finally, so that “all tyranny and lording may be kept out of the church of God, which may soon creep in when the government is placed in the hands of one alone or of a very few,” the work of the church has been given to three distinct offices and to different and qualified men therein (“Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons”).

Finally, “self” does not mean that the church herself is the source of her own authority to act in behalf of Jesus Christ, nor does it mean that the church has the power of herself to exercise her authority faithfully in wisdom, in consecration, and in obedience. The only source of that authority to function in the name of Christ is found in the anointing of the church by the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is only by that Spirit of wisdom, love, and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7) that the church is equipped and pressed into faithful service in truth, holiness, and righteousness under her only Teacher, King, and High Priest, the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, what is meant by “self” in the concept of the three-self formula is that the local church herself has been anointed by Jesus Christ to do her own mandated prophetic, priestly, and royal tasks within her own local gatherings of believers and their seed, within her own cultural and linguistic context, and within the limitations of her own God-given means. She does her threefold Christian task with her own tools and support by faith and trust in Jesus Christ. She does her work according to the Lord’s will and Word. She does it through the ordained men whom the Lord graciously provides and raises up in her membership.

As soon as the Lord makes it possible for her to manifest the unity of the church of Jesus Christ within a federation of churches, she still does her own work in her denomination within the same geographical region, or country, for the propagation, support, and government of her work locally and in common with other churches

in her federation. Similarly, the federation of churches manifests corporately the three-self, Christian character within her labors in common.

Manifesting by the grace of God the elements of the three-self formula of self-propagation, self-support, and self-government, a Christian church institute thereby reflects the threefold office of Jesus Christ her Head as Prophet, Priest, and King (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 12).

First, when the church institute is “self-propagating” in its region, such a church, as a prophetic institution of Jesus Christ, faithfully preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ in her own congregation and in places of mission labor.

While she is faithful in her duty of “self-propagation,” she reflects the fundamental office of Jesus as the Chief Prophet and Teacher in the church. In His name and in harmony with the character of that prophetic office, the “self-propagating” church proclaims the Word and waits upon the Lord for the fruits of her faithful labor, whether it be negative fruit or positive fruit, according to His will and good purpose.

Second, the “self-supporting” church as a priestly institution of Jesus Christ separates herself from all that is opposed to the Lord and His Word and consecrates herself unto the Lord in her task. She is singularly devoted to His Name, His Word, and His ordinances regarding her task. She sacrifices all of herself in devotion to the cause of Jesus Christ, His gospel, and the gathering of His church in the generations of believers and their seed in her local pulpits and in her mission labors. This self-sacrifice is not done by her out of a motive to merit some of her salvation or to impress the Lord or men, but this is her total sacrifice of humble thankfulness for the gracious privilege to be the chosen, redeemed, living body of Jesus Christ.

As the priestly institution of Jesus Christ, functioning in total self-denial and total devotion to the Lord, she manifests the characteristic of being “self-supporting.” Members support her work through the thankful sacrifice of much fervent prayer. Members bring, for thankful sacrifice in worship on the Lord’s Day, the firstfruits of their material increase and employment for the support of the ministry of the Word. Members, within the sphere of loving consecration to our only High Priest, especially show compassion in benevolence for the support of the poor and needy. The purpose of that pity is that the poor might have daily bread for their daily stations and callings, as well as uninterrupted access to the indispensable weekly worship and preaching of the gospel of the church on the Lord’s Days. In so doing, the “self-supporting” church reflects the office of Jesus as our only High Priest in the manifestation of thankful sacrifice, loving devotion, and hearty compassion.

Third, the “self-governing” church, as a royal institution of Jesus Christ, fights against her enemies while, in principle through faith, reigning triumphantly with Christ in His complete victory over His enemies and hers. Her warfare and government are exercised in righteousness, that is, according to the will and ordinances of her Head and Chief Bishop, Jesus Christ. While she by faith functions as the self-governing, royal institution of Jesus Christ, she enjoys by faith the blessings and

peace of being a kingdom of Jesus Christ. This she does in the sure hope of reigning with Christ everlastingly in peace and in her final inheritance of heavenly glory.

This, then, is a legitimate vision, or goal, of foreign missions in a specific field of labor: the development of indigenous, autonomous churches who faithfully and earnestly manifest the threefold Christian character of being self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing.



Ministering to the saints

Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor of Unity Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan

A culture of compassionate care (1) Introduction

Where should we go?

Suppose there is a young man in your church—let’s call him Seth—who is struggling to do his personal devotions and occasionally watches porn. Or suppose there is a young woman in your church—let’s call her Sally—who struggles with anxiety and some bouts of depression. Again, suppose there is a young mother in the church—let’s call her Anna—who recently gave birth to her third child and is overwhelmed with caring for and disciplining three children under the age of five. Or there is a young couple—let’s call them Jack and Jill—who have been married for a few years, but feel distant from each other because of unresolved conflicts. The examples could continue of members struggling with grief, disappointments, sudden changes, being hurt by others, and many other grievous and complicated circumstances. These saints need help. Where should Seth, Sally, Anna, Jack and Jill go for this help? Should they make an appointment with their doctor first? Should they search Google for remedies for their problems? Should they join a Facebook group or follow someone on Instagram who has the same struggles?

An answer we give in the church is that they must first cast their burdens upon the Lord in their suffering and struggles because He is their refuge and strength (Ps. 46) and Shepherd (Ps. 23). Christ is identified in Isaiah 9:6 as the “Wonderful Counselor.” The Lord ministers to the saints through the word and work of Jesus Christ. There is no replacement for a vibrant devotional life of hearing God in the Scriptures and crying out to God in prayer. But is this all? Is it only you

and your Bible when dealing with the multitude of trials and temptations in life?

God’s Word calls us to go to the church because the Wonderful Counselor gives hope and comfort through the means of fellow believers. We go to the church because the members of the church are called to bear “one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). This passage is one of many “one-another” passages in the New Testament emphasizing the calling of saints to love one another, pray for one another, forgive one another, be at peace with one another, not speak evil of another, and so on. These passages are worthy of reading and study because they remind us what the church is called to be in this world of suffering and sin. We go to the church because the God of all comfort comforts “us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (II Cor. 1:4).

After the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the saints in Jerusalem compassionately cared for each other. Acts 2:42 records the following about this growing church, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” And then in Acts 2:44-46, “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart....” What a beautiful culture of compassionate care and fellowship was lived through the work of the Spirit.

The church is called to care for the spiritual lives of its members because this is the work of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ cares for His redeemed people in their wounded and broken lives, the church must do the same with compassion and love. Jesus Christ cares for the brokenhearted and hurting through the other members of the church.

Does your church?

Does the church where you are a member have such a culture of compassionate care? I am sure that to a certain degree it does. Often when we do not know how else to help someone in need, we bring food or try to relieve other physical needs. Placing a card in someone's mailbox at church or sending a text with a Bible verse can be encouraging. When there is a church activity like a church camping or a bowling night, participation is good. Everyone gets along well. But a culture of compassionate care should be deeper and better. How can we actually share and bear each other's burdens?

The reality is that often when there are struggles of faith and sin, we are reluctant to let others in. Why is that? Why is the church not the first place, or even second place, people turn for help with their troubles? There is a variety of reasons for this. For one, the church has not always cared well for the members of the church. Members or officebearers in the church may have responded impatiently to suffering and hurting members, adding to their hurt and pain. Instead of sympathizing with the suffering of a member, maybe they strongly addressed a sinful response to suffering. Instead of coming alongside and listening patiently, maybe someone quoted Romans 8:28 (all things work for good) and sent them on their way. It is possible that in the past the church was not a safe place for people to open up about their faith and sin struggles because of a spirit of pride. Where we have failed, we must repent. But also, we must grow in caring for one another.

Another reason members do not turn to the church for help is that the culture of the world influences the culture of the church. The rugged individualism promoted in this world can seep into the church so that we become more distant from each other. Recently, this individualism and separation grew, in my opinion, through the isolation that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The church is still recovering from this.

Or consider technology. How has technology affected the culture of the church? Today relationships "develop" behind a screen. Face-to-face contact is out and impersonal screens are in. Can we really "___ one another" with our thumbs through cyberspace?

In addition to these cultural influences, we live in a

culture constantly pushing to find answers for spiritual struggles in the world. All of this can affect the church, so that outside of worship on Sunday or an occasional gathering during the week we may have less meaningful fellowship devoted to discussing the messiness of life through the lens of Scripture and praying together. With all the busyness of life (we often say it as if it just happens and we cannot help it), family worship, family time, and church life are squeezed out. With all that we have going on in our lives who has time for caring for the hurting members of the church?

To whom do we go?

To whom should we go in the church in our times of distress and struggle? We might think that the first responders we call are the pastor or the elders. In times of great crisis and distress, certainly call the elders or pastor, as James instructs the church to do. James 4:14 says, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." There are times to call the elders and pastor. But not with everything.

The members of the church also have a calling to help and serve each other with biblical counsel and prayer. The first place to go for help is often found in our homes. A wife seeks the help of her husband or a husband seeks the help of his wife. Children go to mom and/or dad when they are struggling. This may not always be the first place to go because sometimes the spouse or the parents are part of the problem. But normally this is our first option.

Broadening out from there, we seek help from wiser, more experienced members of the church. When we go to these fellow saints, we expect that they will come alongside of us with the riches of God's Word, with compassion, and pray with us and for us. This is the beauty of the communion of the saints in the church. The members of the church are ready to serve. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul calls all the members of the church to care for each other: "Now we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." May this be our vision for the way we support and help each other as we struggle with suffering and against sin. We should want and seek a culture of care in which the members of the church are helping each other.

The title of this rubric is "Ministering to the Saints." *Ministering* is the translation of a New Testament word that means *serving*. This rubric addresses the way saints in the church are to be served or cared for. Recently I searched articles written for this rubric in the new RFPA online search (rfpa.org) and discovered that

most of the articles over the years focused on the calling of elders, deacons, and pastors to minister to the saints. The men Christ appoints to the special offices have a calling to serve the members of the church, especially in their times of overwhelming distress and need. But this service is not only the responsibility of your officebearers. It is also the calling of the entire church.

Years ago, Prof. R. Decker wrote the following in this same rubric (I quote because I certainly could not say it better myself):

The purpose of this rubric is to help the believer grow in the knowledge of Christ, especially as regards his calling to “minister to the saints.” In the light of Holy Scripture and our Reformed confessions we shall study the principles and the practice of ministering to the saints. This will involve an examination of the meaning and significance of the office of believer, and the special offices of minister, elder, and deacon. Included will be, the Lord willing, discussion of such subjects as the preaching of the Word, Christian discipline, family visitation, sick visiting, marital counseling, comforting the sorrowing, caring for the emotionally disturbed, and more.

The fundamental question we face is, who is called to minister to the saints? Who has the right or authority to minister to the saints? And, who has the ability to minister to the saints? The answer is, Jesus Christ! Jesus is the minister of the saints. Christ chooses to minister to the saints through men and by means of His Word and Spirit. Christ ministers to the saints through those men who are lawfully called by the church and, therefore, by Christ Himself to the offices of minister of the Word, elder, and deacon. Christ also ministers to the saints through the saints themselves who share His anointing and thus are, in Christ, prophets, priests, and kings.¹

In the future articles, I want to focus on this last point made by Prof. Decker: how saints minister to fellow saints in the service of Christ. You can look for future articles on the covenant basis of this calling, establishing meaningful relationships, and what this ‘one another’ looks like. For now we have seen that among the saints there must be a culture of compassionate care.

¹ Robert Decker, “Christ Jesus, Our Minister” *Standard Bearer* 72, no. 1 (October 1, 1995), 8, 9.



In memoriam

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

In memoriam: Rev. Bernard J. Woudenberg

On November 17, 2020, Bernard J. Woudenberg entered his everlasting rest, at the age of 89 years and 9 months. He had served the PRCA in her active ministry for forty years. We remember him and the works that God accomplished through him with praise to God for raising him up.

Bernard J. Woudenberg was born on February 16, 1931 in Grand Rapids, MI, in a house less than a mile from the First Protestant Reformed Church on the corner of Fuller and Franklin. He was baptized in First PRC. Part of God’s plan for preparing him for the ministry included his schooling at Baxter Christian elementary school, Grand Rapids Christian High School (graduating in 1949), Calvin College, and the Protes-

tant Reformed Theological Seminary (graduating in 1956).

God also prepared a place for him to begin his ministry. On January 23, 1955, Rev. George Lubbers preached his farewell sermon in Creston PRC, on the northeast side of Grand Rapids. The congregation received several declines before deciding to seek Classis’ approval to disband. But in July 1956 the consistory rescinded that decision, deciding to “put forth one more concerted effort to continue here as a congregation.”¹ After receiving one more decline, the congregation called Candidate Woudenberg, who accepted their call

¹ Minutes of Consistory, Creston PRC, July 16, 1956, Art. 3.



February 16, 1931-

November 17, 2020

and was ordained on October 19, 1956.

The congregation was small—nine families in 1956 and twelve in 1960 when he left. In part, this small size enabled him to assist the seminary, which met less than four miles from his house. The two seminary professors, Herman Hoeksema and George Ophoff, were getting older and had health problems.

In 1958 Ophoff had a stroke, and the Theological School Committee had to arrange for other men to teach his classes. As a result, Rev. Woudenberg taught Old Testament history. Thus were planted the seeds that would bear fruit in many *Standard Bearer* articles on Old Testament history and in his posthumously published book *Moses: Typical Mediator of the Old Covenant*.²

On March 20, 1960, Rev. Woudenberg preached his farewell sermon in Creston PRC, and moved his family to Edgerton, MN. Seven years after the schism of 1953, the Edgerton congregation was still enduring its effects. The De Wolf group in Edgerton had been using the church building and parsonage, but they were about to disband and return to the CRC. The church building was put up for sale, and another church was prepared to buy the building. At that point, Rev. Woudenberg was instrumental in leading the congregation to ask the Supreme Court of the State of Minnesota for another court hearing regarding the rightful owner of the church property, and the court declared the continuing Protestant Reformed congregation to be the rightful owner.³

From Edgerton, Rev. Woudenberg moved farther west to Lynden, WA, where he labored from 1965 to 1976. His interest in mission work was already well known, and he put it to good use in Lynden. Convinced that at the heart of mission work is instruction in doctrine, he began his “Studies in Bible Doctrine” program, in which he recorded classes on cassette tapes and mailed them throughout North America. He was

also instrumental in working with several families in Edmonton, AB, with the fruit that a PRC congregation was organized there.

In November of 1976 he began his last pastorate, this time moving east, to Kalamazoo, MI. There he served for twenty years until his retirement in 1996. During this pastorate he served several terms on our Domestic Mission Committee and Theological School Committee, and made several mission trips to Romania. He is remembered as a preacher who would set forth and develop biblical concepts in his sermons, “to help you stretch and exercise your spiritual legs,” in the words of a former parishioner. He is also remembered for being “tireless” in his work and “fearless” in his leadership. That leadership includes his wise counsel and encouragement when the members of Kalamazoo PRC built their current church building.

God is pleased to give pastors thorns in the flesh in order to remind us not to be exalted. Bernie Woudenberg had chronic eye difficulties, which required him to wear a pair of glasses with a magnifying glass, and later to have one eye surgically removed. But he persevered in his labors, studying the Scriptures and endeavoring to teach good doctrine.

Rev. Woudenberg stayed at the cutting edge of technology for his whole life, being among the first PRC pastors to own a computer in the early 1980s.

God often gives pastors faithful wives to assist them in their work, and Rev. Woudenberg was no exception. Before his ordination, on November 19, 1953, he married Frances Kerkstra. A member of Kalamazoo PRC described her as “very meek, quiet, and godly”—in other words, a true help to a godly man and pastor. Rev. and Frances are survived by their two children, Philip and Luanne.



2 Bernard Woudenberg, *Moses: Typical Mediator of the Old Covenant* (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021). See the publisher’s note on page v.

3 The interested reader can read more about this in *Beacon Lights*, March 2017 (beaconlights.org).

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Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC Redlands express our Christian sympathy to our pastor and his wife, Matt and Sarah Kortus, in the passing of Sarah's father, **James Koole**. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Randy Hendriks, Vice President
Peter Smit, Clerk

Bound volumes

The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 98. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the **RFPA office** before the end of October. For additional orders, call Marco at (616) 457-5970.

Reformed Witness Hour reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. W. Bruinsma

- October 2—The Believer's True Identity
II Corinthians 5:17
- October 9—Behold, Famine Is Come
Amos 8:11, 12
- October 16—Resist the Devil
I Peter 5:8, 9
- October 23—Man's Calling to Serve God
Genesis 2:16, 17
- October 30—I Am God
Psalm 46:8-11

Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness to our covenant-keeping God, the family of **Mark and Cindy Ophoff** express joy at their 40th wedding anniversary. We praise God for their Christian example, their dedication to our family and their love for the church of Christ. Psalm 128:4-6: "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel."

David and Briana Ophoff

Levi, Luke, Rose, Eden, Selah

Caleb and Kristin Kamps

Noah, Jenna, Gideon

Bradley and Taylor Ophoff

Pearl, Petrinella

Daniel and Anne Ophoff

Everly, Henry

Wyoming, Michigan

Reformation Lecture:

Sexual Abuse in Calvin's Geneva

7:30 P.M. on October 27, 2022

Southwest PRC (Wyoming, MI)

Livestream at southwestprc.org

Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us "there is no new thing under the sun." Is that true with respect to sexual abuse? Did this horrific sin manifest itself in the life of the reformation churches? If so, is there anything we can learn from the Reformers and the consistories about how to handle this travesty found in the church yet today? Plan to attend this timely lecture (or listen online) as Prof. Cory Griess explains how the consistory in Calvin's Geneva handled cases of sexual abuse.