

The Standard Bearer

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Jesus' appearance to Thomas

Rev. James Slopsema

A crisis of authority: Critical church theory

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

The Asbury University revival, and more

Rev. Daniel Holstege

The Council of Constantinople (680): Meeting

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

The true freedom of the will

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani



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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Jesus' appearance to Thomas

The other disciples therefore said unto him [Thomas], We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

John 20:25-29

Our Lord appeared to His disciples ten times after His resurrection and before His ascension into heaven. Jesus appeared to various of His disciples five times on the very day of His resurrection, the last of which was to the ten disciples without Thomas. In this meditation we deal with the sixth appearance of Jesus one week later to the disciples again. This appearance was especially for the sake of Thomas, because a week before he would not believe the disciples' report that Jesus had risen.

The appearances of Jesus after His resurrection were very significant. They not only served to establish the fact of Jesus' resurrection but were also used by Jesus to instruct His disciples concerning the significance of the resurrection. The same is true with this appearance of Jesus to Thomas.

Since we have just celebrated Jesus' resurrection, it is appropriate that we treat one of Jesus' appearances.

A persistent unbelief

Thomas refused to believe the report of the other disciples that they had seen the risen Lord.

The gospels record that the disciples initially thought that what they saw was merely Jesus' spirit. However, Jesus proved to them that it was He in the flesh. He

showed them His hands where the nails had fastened Him to the cross and the wound in His side where the spear of the soldier had pierced Him. This proved that it was He, Jesus. Plus, He ate a piece of bread and fish in their presence. This proved that it was not merely Jesus' spirit that they saw.

But for some reason Thomas was not present that evening. And Thomas would not believe the report of the disciples. No doubt they told him all that they had seen. His nail-pierced hands. The wound in His side. He had eaten fish and bread with them. But Thomas was firm, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

This was unbelief. That is evident from Jesus' response to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."

We must understand what Jesus meant that Thomas was faithless. The meaning is not that Thomas was an unbeliever possessing no faith. Judas Iscariot had been an unbeliever, masking as a true believer. But he had shown his true colors. Thomas was no Judas but a believing child of God. Rather, the idea is that, even though Thomas possessed true faith, he failed to believe the resurrection of Jesus. There are times when in weakness of faith God's people are not able to believe the works and promises of God. This is especially in times of adversity when it appears that God's promises are not true. It is also true when God does something extraordinary. Then we must see it to believe it. The latter was the case with Thomas.

From this occasion comes the phrase "doubting Thomas." This expression is used to describe one who is not easily persuaded but has doubts. However, in all fairness to Thomas, let us understand that Thomas was essentially no different from the other disciples. The other disciples also doubted the report they had heard of Jesus' resurrection from the women who had visited Jesus' grave. They were not convinced until they had seen the physical evidence of it. This was certainly true of Peter and John who went to the grave and saw the

grave clothes. And when Jesus appeared to the ten on the evening of His resurrection, they thought they only saw Jesus' spirit come from the dead. Thomas was essentially no different from these. The only difference was one of degree. Thomas was more emphatic and vocal concerning his doubts.

A wonderful confession!

Jesus invited Thomas to reach out and place his finger in the nail prints of His hand and put his own hand in the spear thrust in His side, charging him to be not faithless, but believing.

Thomas' response was to stammer, "My Lord and my God."

This was a marvelous confession of faith on Thomas' part.

It was an acknowledgment on the part of Thomas, first, that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Notice, Thomas did not shrink back in fear, supposing he saw Jesus' spirit. Nor did he carefully examine Jesus' wounds. Rather, he responded to Jesus in utter astonishment. He obviously accepted the fact that it was Jesus whom he saw. And considering all that had happened, he also accepted the fact that Jesus was risen from the dead.

But this was also a confession on Thomas's part that he still looked to and clung to Jesus as the Savior.

The disciples had all along recognized Jesus as their Lord and their God.

They had consistently addressed Him as Lord, a title that was given to those of high rank and position. They had addressed Jesus as their Lord because of their belief that He was the Messiah. They looked to Him as their Lord to establish the kingdom of God.

And therefore, they had also looked to Jesus as their God. It was commonly understood that the promised Messiah would be God. After the completion of the third Galilean tour, the disciples were rock solid in their belief in Jesus. Speaking for the rest, Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

Now Thomas, upon seeing Jesus, uttered in amazement and rather spontaneously, "My Lord and my God." This was really a confession on the part of Thomas that Jesus was still his Lord and God. Jesus' death had no doubt shattered Thomas' conviction of all this. But now that he sees the risen Lord, he is convinced of these things. Thomas does not understand the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection. But despite all this, he lays hold of the risen Jesus as his Lord and God.

Thomas is no more faithless, but believing.

A great blessing

In response to Thomas' confession, Jesus contrasts the faith of Thomas, who believed because he saw, to the faith of others who would believe even though they would not see.

We must understand the nature of the contrast here. Jesus is not contrasting Thomas to other of his contemporaries. They all needed to see Jesus before they believed His resurrection. Jesus is rather contrasting the faith of Thomas, and thereby the faith of all the disciples, with the faith of those who in the future would believe. Thomas and the others needed to see the risen Lord before they believed the resurrection. In the future, many would believe the resurrection, even though they had never seen with their eyes the risen Lord.

The difference is Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church.

Prior to Pentecost the church, including the disciples, possessed faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. And by reason of that faith, the disciples believed in Jesus as Lord and God. But their faith in Jesus staggered at His resurrection. The patriarchs and prophets had spoken of His death and resurrection. But when these events took place, the disciples at first did not believe. There were several reasons for this. There was the nature of the resurrection. It was a resurrection unto glory that left them only with an empty grave. And then there was the lack of revelation. All the disciples had in the Old Testament revelation of the resurrection was a shadow of the real thing to come. And then there was the immaturity of their faith because the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out upon them. And so, Jesus had to appear to the disciples for them to believe the fact of the resurrection.

But after Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, faith does not need to see the risen Lord. The faith that the Spirit of Pentecost works in the hearts of God's people is fuller, richer, and more mature. In addition, that faith has the fuller revelation of the New Testament Scriptures, which bring us beyond the shadows of the Old Testament to the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ. And so, faith believes the resurrection even though the believer has never seen the risen Lord.

And those who believe are blessed, as Jesus indicated by His greeting to the disciples, "Peace be unto you." This was more than a formal greeting. It revealed the work of the risen Lord to bring peace to the church. This peace is peace with God, and then peace with all those who are at peace with God. Jesus laid the foundation of this peace at the cross through the complete atonement of sin. But as the risen Lord, Jesus makes this peace a living reality. Jesus does this

by securing for us the forgiveness of our sins through His intercessory prayers. And He changes our heart and lives so that we live in love rather than in enmity against God.

Jesus proclaims this blessing to those who believe in

His resurrection even though they never see Him in this life. Do you know the risen Lord? Many today stumble at the resurrection and thus do not enjoy this peace. Let us believe in the risen Lord and look for the peace of the resurrection.



Editorial

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

A crisis of authority: Critical church theory

Over the last several years, the church of Christ has been rocked by wave after wave of trouble. These troubles are not isolated to our own denomination; it seems that many Reformed and Presbyterian denominations are facing similar issues. For instance, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of consistories in arranging worship services was polarizing. At around the same time, doctrinal controversies were swirling and gut-wrenching church splits took place. This was followed by an increased awareness of sexual abuse and concerns about how churches are handling (or mishandling) these cases. Christ's church has been sailing in troubled waters of late.

A question worth considering is this: Is there something that ties all these different struggles together? Are they so many disconnected happenings, or is there an underlying issue that connects them?

Without resorting to hyperbole and claiming that this is *the* fundamental issue, I propose that *an* issue wrapped up in all these different troubles is the matter of *authority* in the church. To one degree or another, all these issues touch on the use or misuse of authority and the view one has of authority. What the church is facing, then, is a crisis of authority.

If that is the case, then it is necessary for us to be reminded of the proper, biblical view of authority. I intend to do that in a few editorials.

As I see it, the church is being tugged about by two dangerous rip currents. The first is a critical approach to the idea of authority that essentially wants to destroy structures of authority altogether. The second is the misuse and abuse of authority. Before setting forth the positive view of authority, I want to examine these two cross-currents. The first is the subject of this article, and the second I hope to address in my next editorial.

Critical theory

To understand the view that wants to remove all authority structures in the church, we need to understand something about *critical theory*.¹

Most scholars agree that the notion of critical theory has its origins in the early 1900s at the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. The intention of the Institute was to interact with and develop Marxist thought. The German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883)² taught materialism, that what we see is all there is and that there is no higher, spiritual realm. Especially he emphasized the role of economics and its influence on society and relationships. He criticized capitalism because of the inherent division he saw between the wealthy class who owned the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat). Marx's division of society into an oppressive ruling class and an oppressed working class was key not only to his own thinking but was

1 For what follows on critical theory, I relied heavily on the following articles: Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, "The Incompatibility of Critical Theory and Christianity," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/incompatibility-critical-theory-christianity/>; Neil Shenvi, "Critical Theory Within Evangelicalism," <https://shenviapologetics.com/critical-theory-within-evangelicalism/>; Eric Watkins, "Christianity or Critical Theory?" <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/christianity-or-critical-theory/>; Martyn McGeown, "Critical Theory," <https://cdn.rfpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/15181354/2021-04-15C.pdf>. In the interests of full disclosure, I also gleaned a few bits of information from Michael Grasso, "The OPC, GRACE, Diane Langberg, and Critical Theory, Part 1: Critical Theory," <https://greenbaggin.wordpress.com/2022/02/18/the-opc-grace-diane-langberg-and-critical-theory-part-1-critical-theory/>, although I am aware of criticisms of Grasso's work.

2 For more on Marx's philosophy, cf. Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 51-59.

foundational for later critical theory. In fact, some have labeled critical theory as “cultural Marxism.” It ought to be noted though that while critical theory owes much to Marxism, it ought not be equated with Marxism.

What Marx originally applied to economics and class divisions, critical theory has taken up and applied to most other areas of society. This theory is called “critical” because it is critical of any existing structure of authority in society. It views every relationship between people in terms of the difference of power and authority, and it assumes all systems of power are corrupt. Critical theory divides individuals into two classes: the class of oppressors and the class of the oppressed. It then attempts to explain all the problems in society in the light of this division, particularly the abuse of authority carried out by the oppressors. They see oppression occurring whenever there is any inequality between different people.

The way in which they see this oppression occurring is not by brute force, however. Rather, they speak of the oppressive class exercising “hegemonic power,” by which they mean “the ability of dominant groups to impose their norms, values, and expectations on society as a whole, relegating other groups to subordinate positions.”³ The oppressive class may not even be aware of its oppression, yet the oppression continues because their values are impressed upon society at large.

So significant is this matter of oppression, that it forms the core identity of every person. One’s individual identity is inseparable from the class of oppressors or oppressed to which one belongs. So, if a person is white, he automatically is oppressive. If a person is a woman, she is automatically oppressed.

Some have taken the basic ideology of critical theory and applied it to race, thus giving rise to *critical race theory*. Critical race theory views all the problems of history as a result of the division of society into a dominant, oppressive race (usually whites) and other minority, oppressed races. This has given rise to such terms as “white privilege” and “white fragility.” Critical race theory drives the Black Lives Matter movement.

When the basic ideology of critical theory is applied to gender, you have *feminism*. The core belief of feminism is that the problems of history are a result of the division of society into a dominant, oppressive gender (males) and a marginalized, oppressed gender (females).

When the basic ideology of critical theory is applied to sexuality, you have *queer theory* or the *LGBTQ movement*. The core belief of the LGBTQ movement

is that the problems of history are a result of the division of society into a dominant, oppressive “sexual orientation” (heterosexuality) and other marginalized, oppressed “sexual orientations” (homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, queer, etc.). This ideology has spawned such terms as “heteronormativity” and “cisgender.”

Frequently, proponents of critical theory will speak of *intersectionality*. This refers to the way in which these different, critical categories of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation overlap and affect the person. For example, on one end of the spectrum is a person who belongs not only to the oppressive class of whites, but also to the oppressive class of being a male and the oppressive class of being heterosexual. In the eyes of many critical theorists, there is no sin as great as belonging to the intersectionality of being a white, heterosexual male. On the opposite end of the spectrum would be a person who belongs to the oppressed class of being black, the oppressed class of being a female, and the oppressed class of being a homosexual. This intersectionality of being a black, homosexual female must be acknowledged in order to understand her plight.

The person who adheres to the ideology of critical theory is *woke*, that is, he or she has been awakened to the realities of these injustices.

The endgame of critical theory is the dismantling of all traditional structures of authority. Critical theory is not merely academic, but it is intended to spark revolution and the overthrow of traditional powers. Two authors who have examined critical theory have said: “... critical theory is associated with a metanarrative that runs from oppression to liberation: We are members either of a dominant group or of a marginalized group with respect to a given identity marker. As such, we either need to divest ourselves of power and seek to liberate others, or we need to acquire power and liberate ourselves by dismantling all structures and institutions that subjugate and oppress. In critical theory, the greatest sin is oppression, and the greatest virtue is the pursuit of liberation.”⁴

In their pursuit of “liberation,” advocates of critical theory will “cancel” anyone or anything that stands in the way of their aims. This is the “cancel culture” one reads about so often. If you have ever said or written anything contrary to critical theory, you will be “cancelled,” perhaps by being smeared on social media or by losing your career. Often financial pressures are brought to bear. Athletes caught on video using a homophobic slur are dropped by their sponsors. Woke companies

3 Shenvi and Sawyer, “The Incompatibility of Critical Theory and Christianity.”

4 Shenvi and Sawyer, “The Incompatibility of Critical Theory and Christianity.”

such as Apple and Amazon may refuse to do business with another company or individual that rejects critical theory. Try searching on Amazon for the book *When Harry Became Sally*, a book disapproving of queer theory, and you'll find that Amazon has banned it.⁵

A crucial element of critical theory is the notion that only members of the oppressed class have access to "truth." They possess this access to truth because of their "lived experience" of oppression. This means that only people of color can talk about race, because they alone have the lived experience of being oppressed by whites. Only women may speak about issues of gender, because they alone have the lived experience of being oppressed by men. Only homosexuals and transgender persons may speak about matters of sexuality, because they alone have the lived experience of being oppressed by heterosexuals. The marginalized alone have that unique insight.

In fact, so adamant are proponents of critical theory that truth resides with the oppressed class, that anyone even questioning that idea is engaging in oppressive behavior. Any critique of critical theory, any appeal to reason or evidence, immediately marks a person out as belonging to an oppressive class. No white person may ever speak about issues of race. No male may ever speak about issues of gender. No heterosexual may ever speak about issues of sexuality. If they would do so, they would, perhaps without knowing it, engage in the continued oppression of the marginalized. They would be attempting to protect their position of power and privilege.

The difficulty in identifying and evaluating critical theory is in its deceptiveness. Advocates of critical theory certainly are able to point out real injustices. It is certainly true in the history of the United States that white people have maintained racist attitudes and wickedly treated blacks and other people of color. It is certainly true that throughout history men have looked down upon and taken advantage of women. These are things rightly to be identified and opposed. But often the proponents of critical theory will move subtly from real examples of oppression to false ones. They will define oppression so broadly and imprecisely that almost anything one does not like becomes oppressive. For instance, a person might condemn all sinful abuse of women by men and yet still be considered oppressive because he maintains complementarianism and the God-given authority of a husband with respect to his wife. Or a person might condemn racism and the enslavement of blacks and yet be considered oppressive because he refuses to march with Black Lives Matter. A person may cry, "Oppression!" whenever they

want, and automatically that is accepted as oppressive. When oppression is defined so loosely, anything passes for oppression.

Critical church theory

The purpose of this article is not to present a full-blown explanation and critique of critical theory. Hopefully, it is apparent to Christians that critical theory belongs to the rebellious spirit of the end times, as II Timothy 3:1-2 predicts: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be...disobedient...."

Neither is my purpose to warn Christians from adopting the mindset of critical theory with respect to race, gender, class, and sexuality. Certainly, that warning must be given.

But my purpose in explaining the basics of critical theory is to examine how that thinking may shape mentalities among Christians *toward the church*. The church is swimming in the cultural waters of critical theory, and we would be naive to say that this ideology could never seep into the church. We are not so immune from the thinking of the world around us. Often, without even knowing it, the church begins to adopt the mentality and terminologies of the world. And the danger is that the thinking of critical theory governs a person's view of the church. We might call this "critical church theory."

The supposition of a critical theory of the church is that the authority structures in the church are corrupt. That begins with the male officebearers, and with pastors and elders in particular, who occupy positions of authority in the church. The perception is that pastors and elders are no good. They are an oppressive class. They are an "old-boys club," self-protective and self-perpetuating, interested only in maintaining their authority. This means that consistories can never be trusted and that officebearers are the enemy. Since in Reformed polity these same men are delegated to classis and synod meetings, the classis and synod are thoroughly rotten as well.

One evidence of this is a thorough distrust of the notion of confidentiality, long held to be a necessity in much of the work of elders. For elders to say that they cannot talk about a certain aspect of their work as a matter of confidentiality, or for a broader assembly to deliberate a matter in closed session, is immediately viewed as a cover-up and further evidence of their oppressive behavior.

If the thinking of critical theory takes firm root, then a person may go so far as to believe that, as an oppressed member of the church, they alone have access to "truth." For anyone to offer any critique of their posi-

5 Trueman, *Strange New World*, 146.

tion is out of the question and only a further indication of oppression. Any defense by a pastor or elder of male authority in the church is seen as “elder privilege” and a protection of oppressors.

If critical theory comes to full bloom in the church, then the end goal is to deconstruct church. Or, to put it more bluntly, the goal is to tear the church down brick by brick, to burn it to the ground, and to construct in its place something new where male elders are not in authority. Perhaps there is the use of social media to “cancel” various men, slandering them and dragging

their name through the mud until they are thoroughly discredited.

We would do well to examine our own thinking about the church to be sure that the anti-authority spirit of the age does not creep in and give rise to sinful attitudes and actions toward those in God-ordained positions of authority.

And yet...at the same time, the difficulty is that there has been the real misuse and abuse of authority in the church, leaving God’s people legitimately confused and hurting. I want to look into that more next time.

Letters

More on spousal abuse

Dear Prof. Huizinga,

Your editorial on “Confronting Spousal Abuse” (March 15, 2023, p. 269) left me stunned and disappointed. I beg of you to research the topic of spousal abuse more thoroughly especially in the instance of an abusive wife. You state that spousal abuse is mainly a male problem. I find that to be a distressing and groundless viewpoint. Every marriage is made up of both a husband and a wife. Every marriage is made up of sinful partners.

I would guess that you have in your pastoring already faced women who abuse their husbands. But you fail to recognize it and you tell the husband, “You must love your wife more.” There is always the tendency to believe that it is mainly the male problem. How many men are going to come forward and say they are being abused. They already live in a situation where they are verbally, emotionally, and psychologically emasculated. They are supposed to be the head of the home, the example of Christ in the marriage. To come forward and confess that they are not is unthinkable.

I would direct your attention to two different sources and would encourage all pastors and officebearers to become familiar with the abusive wife. To speak of this as mainly a male problem is to ignore the facts and the research. I would direct your attention to an article by Weslie Onsando called “Male Abuse in Marriage? Why an Abusive Wife Is No Laughing Matter.” This was an article put out by Focus on the Family in November of 2021. The second source you should read is *The Abusive Wife: Ministering to the Contentious Woman* by David D. Edgington, PhD.

It should come as no surprise that women seek control as well as men. Headship is such an issue today that our mother denomination, the CRC, has given up headship roles to women who serve the special offices in church.

To think that this does not affect our marriages and cannot be true is to put our head in the sand and deny or ignore the evidence. A woman in her marriage can also seek control through subtle means. She will manipulate, intimidate, browbeat, withhold intimacy (weaponize sex), shift blame, isolate her husband, and use many other means to control. This is not just a male problem.

It might sound unbelievable. It might sound laughable. The man has to “toughen up.” Society always views the man as the aggressor. When a case of domestic violence is called in, invariably it is the husband who is arrested and taken in. Are we blindly following societal standards? In a situation where a man is abusing his wife, he is called to see his sin and repent from it. How many times have we ever had to call an abusive wife to see her sin and repent from it? My best guess? Never. That is because it is mainly a male problem. As long as we continue to view it as a male problem, then we will never hold a wife accountable for her abuse of her husband. And it does happen, more than we care to admit.

Prof. Huizinga, I look forward to your next article where you take a clear-eyed look at this form of spousal abuse. Don’t make this mainly a male problem. See abuse for what it is and know that it cuts across gender. This is not a modern sin. Look at what Solomon says in Proverbs 15:24 or 21:9, “It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.” Proverbs 27:15 compares a contentious woman to a continual dropping in a rainy day.

Regards,
Jay Kalsbeek
Loveland, CO

Response

Dear Jay,

Thank you for your letter on a subject we both find most unpleasant, but serious and necessary to address.

First, the issue raised in your letter is whether spousal abuse is *mainly a male problem*. The position I stated is that spousal abuse is not perpetrated “exclusively” by males, but “mainly” by males, so that where there is abuse in marriage, “usually it is the man who abuses his wife.” You contest my position as a “groundless viewpoint,” the taking of which “is to ignore the facts and research.” I disagree on the basis of experience and study. I will not argue this point, but my position was not taken without considerable research and I am happy to send to any interested reader a compilation of resources in demonstration of my position.

Second, the issue here is *abuse*. I am well aware of the fact that in marriage, including Christian marriages, women are sinners as much as men. Indeed, there are women who are guilty of all kinds of horrible sins against their husbands in marriage. Indeed, there are disrespectful and unruly women who detest male headship, particularly their own husband’s, and even seek to become head in the home, and perhaps even in the church. Indeed, there are contentious and argumentative women who make miserable the lives of other people, especially their husbands. But the issue here is not *sin* in marriage. The issue is not even the sin of *brazen insubordination* in marriage. The issue is *abuse*.

Abuse is a difficult issue not only because it is an exceedingly painful reality, but because it is a complex reality that demands great care when it comes to the definition and application of terms. What is abuse? What is not abuse? When does sin in marriage rise to the level of abuse? While I explained in my article that abuse exists across a spectrum and consists of much more than body-blows, I *defined* spousal abuse as “an inexcusable pattern of murderous behavior in which the abuser, as a self-serving and controlling oppressor, intentionally perpetrates many forms of violence against the spouse.” Working with that definition, which con-

tains fundamental elements included in definitions given by other more qualified authors, I stand by what I originally wrote. I know that there are women who abuse their husbands. That does not sound “unbelievable” or “laughable” to me. But when there is abuse in marriage, it is *usually* the husband who abuses his wife.

Third, I believe your letter makes a helpful contribution to our understanding of spousal abuse by calling attention to abusive wives. It is possible that we *say* females can be guilty of abuse, but we do not actually *believe* it, or *apply* that truth operationally. There is a very real danger that we come to think that *only* males can be abusive in marriage. Then we potentially put an oppressed husband in a hopeless position in which his abusive wife not only systematically destroys him but deftly manipulates officebearers and counselors into viewing her as the victim and him as the abuser. I and others, including consistories, do well to hear your plea to take more seriously the reality of abusive wives, and how difficult it would be for an abused husband to come forward and cry for help. I exhort myself and others to hear you, brother, and I thank you for your recommendations for study.

Since my article focused on abused wives, I now write to all abused husbands and to husbands with unruly wives who make them miserable. May God be gracious to you and sustain you in your plight, and may He graciously cause us to grow in our knowledge and willingness to help you. May God be gracious to your wife and save her from her wickedness. May God be gracious to the church so that our “sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace” (Ps. 144:12).

Sincerely in Christ,
Prof. B. Huizinga



All around us

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of the Wingham PRC in Wingham, Ontario, Canada

The Asbury University revival; Saddleback Church removed from the SBC; Photos from the James Webb space telescope

The Asbury University revival

What happened at Asbury University this past February? Asbury is a university that was founded in 1890 in

the small town of Wilmore, Kentucky by men of the Wesleyan and Methodist movement with its “tradition of revivals and a theology that teaches people to wait

for a divine wind to blow.”¹ On February 8, a regular morning chapel service at the Hughes Auditorium on campus unexpectedly did not end. After the choir sang a final chorus, according to one Asbury professor, “... something began to happen that defies easy description. Students did not leave. They were struck by what seemed to be a quiet but powerful sense of transcendence, and they did not want to go. They stayed and continued to worship. They are still there.”²

Over the next several days, thousands of people flocked to Wilmore by car, bus, and plane from around the country and the world as news of the event spread rapidly through social media. Despite the growing numbers, some estimating 20,000 over one of the weekends, the event was described as peaceful and joyful with hours and hours of singing, praying, confessing sin, and listening to speakers. The overflowing crowds waited to enter the auditorium or watched the service on screens set up outdoors, in other buildings, and at the nearby seminary. Similar events began to pop up at other private Christian universities around the country.

Finally, on February 24, Asbury announced the end of what has been called a revival, an awakening, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Responses to the event have been many and diverse, favorable and critical, from those convinced a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit has taken place, and others who sought sociological or psychological explanations.

No true believer today questions the fact that Christianity in the West has been in serious decline for a long time, that churches have been falling away left and right, and that a generation of young people now exists that does not know the Lord. So when thousands of young people seem to wake up all at once and pour out a tremendous stream of worship to God, we can hardly help but marvel and scratch our heads a bit, wondering what just happened. Perhaps some observers even felt an aching desire to feel the same kind of spiritual excitement that was on display.

In Reformed circles, we tend to be critical of revivalism, and rightly so.³ That does not mean we see no

need for spiritual awakening among the members of Christ’s church. There is a constant need to hear the call, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14). Sometimes there is widespread spiritual apathy and ungodly behavior in the church. Is that true today? Do you see that in your circles? If so, rather than pray for the kind of sudden and fleeting revival that was reported to have happened at Asbury; rather than being critical or discontent with the ordinary means of grace and the ordinary Christian life with its joys and sorrows...let us pray without ceasing that the Lord will fill our own local pastors with His Holy Spirit to preach the gospel purely and passionately to our hearts from Sunday to Sunday, so that we may testify, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15). Let us pray that he will raise up men for the ministry who believe deep in their hearts, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (I Cor. 9:16) and “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8), so that they long to “speak comfortably to Jerusalem” and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished and her iniquity is pardoned (Is. 40:2).

Let us walk in the spheres where the Spirit ordinarily operates so that we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16) but sing to each other “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). Let us seek to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge (Eph. 3:18-19).

The Lord will wake up His spiritually slumbering people in His time and according to His will by the ordinary but beautiful means of grace when they faithfully set forth Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead as our hope in life and death.

Saddleback Church removed from the SBC

On February 21, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) removed Saddleback Church from the denomination because they ordained a female teaching pastor, the wife of Andy Wood, who is the new senior pastor of the church.⁴ Saddleback Church is a megachurch in Orange County, California that was founded and pastored

1 Daniel Sillman, *Christianity Today*, “No Celebrities Except Jesus: How Asbury Protected the Revival,” February 23, 2023 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/february/asbury-revival-outpouring-protect-work-admin-volunteers.html>).

2 Tom McCall, *Christianity Today*, “Asbury Professor: We’re Witnessing a ‘Surprising Work of God,’” February 13, 2023 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/february-web-only/asbury-revival-1970-2023-methodist-christian-holy-spirit.html>).

3 See Herman Hanko’s series of articles on “Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist” in the *Standard Bearer* from November 1,

2005 to April 1, 2006. He calls Charles Finney (1792-1875) the “father of American revivalism.” Finney was an outright Pelagian who preached a false gospel but sparked revivals everywhere by manipulative preaching that appealed to emotions.

4 <https://ministrywatch.com/southern-baptists-oust-rick-warrens-saddleback-church-for-naming-a-female-pastor>.

for more than forty years by Rick Warren, author of the popular books *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*. This was not the first time Saddleback ordained women into ministry positions. But it was the first time they ordained a woman as a “teaching pastor.” Four other churches were also ousted from the SBC for similar reasons.

One Southern Baptist pastor was hotly opposed to the decision to remove Saddleback, tweeting that the decision was “driven by power, male supremacy; and it stinks in the nostrils of God.”⁵ A former Southern Baptist pastor, who doubts the SBC will allow women pastors any time soon, made these interesting remarks from the same *Los Angeles Times*’ article:

Our seminary enrollment is down. All trends in theological education indicate that fewer and fewer men are going to seminary and seeking the degrees that have historically been conferred upon pastors in Southern Baptist life. If there are 47,000 Southern Baptist churches and 20 years from now you only have 20,000 men who want to be pastors, there are going to be some tough decisions to be made.

In other words, he thinks the SBC might just cave in and allow women pastors for the practical reason that there are not enough men.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in no uncertain terms by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (I Tim. 2:11-13). The Word of God does not allow women to hold office in the church. But, as in the case of Deborah, a godly mother in Israel who supported fearful Barak and urged him to take the lead, let the godly women in the church today encourage the godly men, with a meek and quiet spirit (I Pet. 3:4), and help them to be good leaders.

As we stand against the liberal trend of women’s ordination, may God forbid that we men be “driven by power” or the notion of “male supremacy,” and grant us a spirit of humble obedience to God’s Word and a servant’s heart. May God prevent manipulative and arrogant men from becoming leaders, and give us pastors and elders who are truly blameless, chaste, sober, meek, patient, and wise leaders (I Tim. 3:1-7).

Photos from the James Webb space telescope

The James Webb Space Telescope is the most advanced

telescope launched into space in human history, superior to the famous Hubble Space Telescope. Launched into space in December 2021, the highly sophisticated telescope sent back its first photographs of deep space in July of 2022 and has been stunning the scientific community ever since. Just last January, scientists thought they discovered six new galaxies that supposedly took form less than 600 million years after the Big Bang. The massive size of these purported galaxies stunned scientists so much that some are questioning their whole beloved theory about the origin of the universe. In an Associated Press article entitled “Space telescope uncovers massive galaxies near cosmic dawn,” Australian scientist Ivo Labbe is reported to have said that

he and his team didn’t think the results were real at first—that there couldn’t be galaxies as mature as the Milky Way so early in time—and they still need to be confirmed. The objects appeared so big and bright that some members of the team thought they had made a mistake. “We were mind-blown, kind of incredulous.”⁶

In the same article, another scientist is reported to have said, “It turns out we found something so unexpected it actually creates problems for science. It calls the whole picture of early galaxy formation into question.”

Are these photographs leading any scientists who are committed to a materialistic worldview and the Big Bang theory to reconsider the truth that God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning? Only God can open the closed heart of a man to understand the mysteries of the origin of the universe as He has revealed them in His Word. When you begin with a childlike faith that holds for truth all that God reveals in His Word, so that you confess that God created the whole universe in six days at the dawn of time, new discoveries like this do not create the kind of problems for your science that call into question your belief about galaxy formation. You know that God made those galaxies just as they are in the beginning, as He tells you, “I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (Is. 45:12). So when you see these new discoveries, you fall down and worship and sing, “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens” (Ps. 8:1).

5 <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-02-26/a-war-on-women-why-the-southern-baptist-convention-really-ousted-saddleback-church>.

6 <https://apnews.com/article/webb-space-telescope-galaxies>.



Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge teacher of New Testament history at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan and member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan

The reliability of John Mark

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

II Timothy 4:11

The year was AD 50. The first missionary journey was complete. The early church judged it a success, for faithful missionaries were used to plant new churches. Then, through conflict with certain Jews, the celebration continued as the church rejoiced in the Spirit's development of truth through the significant decision of the Jerusalem Council: Do not require laws to burden the Gentiles (Acts 15:19).

The gospel of pure grace was preserved as the church understood more fully that there is free salvation in Jesus Christ and that the laws of the Old Testament, including circumcision, are not required for a believer to be received into the church.

But unforeseen conflict arose. Paul and Barnabas, the mission leaders, had a sharp contention as plans were being made for a second journey. So sharp, that "they departed asunder" (Acts 15:39).

The contention? The reliability of John Mark.

Paul refused to bring him along because he left them mid-way through the first journey (Acts 13:13, 15:38). Paul's concern was whether Mark would show himself unreliable once again. Paul knew that on the second missionary journey there would be new challenges and more difficulties in the planting of churches. The contention led Paul to choose Silas (15:40-41).

Barnabas was adamant that they bring Mark (Acts 15:37) but, through Paul's refusal, Barnabas returned to Cyprus, taking the 'unreliable' Mark with him (15:38).

Who was right in the disagreement?

In the church, respected leaders can disagree. They can have the same information, the same objectives, yet their perspectives on the process can differ. In the end, diverse perspectives can be used to reach the same end.

So, *was* John Mark reliable? He certainly was, for he matured through special friendships with the great apostles, Paul and Peter, and showed himself faithful in the early church.

John. Mark. John Mark. Marcus. Four different designations for a Jew born in Jerusalem. It was to his house that Peter first traveled after his miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:12). We can speculate that his home was the location of the Last Supper (Mark 14:12-25), and he may have even seen Jesus directly in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:51-52).¹

But it was with Peter that Mark had his first real encounters with the gospel. For a few verses after Peter's appearance at his home, we read that Barnabas and Paul chose Mark for the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). Based on Luke's narrative in Acts, Barnabas began as the leader, but then Paul took the lead role as his name is mentioned prior to Barnabas soon into the first journey (13:9). So perhaps Barnabas saw something in Mark right away.

Barnabas may have seen gifts in Mark that led to his perspective in his disagreement with Paul. We do not know why Mark left them on the first journey—perhaps he felt he had had enough experience, but it is possible that he felt apprehension about the dangers that awaited them as they would travel into Pamphylia and Galatia.² We can understand young Mark's concern over his own ability to continue being a valuable assistant to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:5).

While Paul interpreted Mark's departure as desertion, Barnabas gave him the benefit of the doubt, and as it turns out, he was right about Mark.³

It should be noted that Mark was the nephew of Barnabas (Col 4:10). We know the strength of family ties; therefore, that might lead one to side with Paul in the disagreement from Acts 15. But the references to Mark following this episode tell a much different story.

So, who *was* Mark? He was the human writer of

1 J. Gresham Machen. *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 200.

2 Don Doezema, *Upon This Rock*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Protestant Reformed Sunday School Teachers Association, 2003), 181.

3 Cory Griess. "Barnabas" (sermon preached May 6, 2018). <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=5618116167>

the Gospel according to Mark, and he may have been a man of brevity as deduced from the multiple uses in his gospel of the words “straightway,” “suddenly,” and “immediately” (roughly 40 times in the sixteen chapters). This personality trait may have led to his returning to Jerusalem on the first missionary journey once they reached the shores of Pamphylia.

But Mark *was* reliable, and a crucial player in the growth of the early church.

Peter saw it first, and a special friendship formed through that first appearance at his home. The clearest example is from Peter’s first epistle. “The church that is at Babylon [Rome] elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son” (I Pet. 5:13). My son! Peter demonstrated the reliability of Mark through this simple greeting, and showed that Mark was one with him in the faith, a spiritual son.

In addition, Mark’s friendship with Peter contributed to Mark being a reliable author of his own gospel account. He may have written it during his time with Peter in Rome in the mid-60s AD. Mark may not have been an apostle, but his close association with Peter helped solidify the authority of what he wrote as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And this gives special meaning to what Mark records concerning the resurrection, as the angel brought comfort to those standing at Jesus’ tomb. “But go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:7). *And Peter*. As a friend of Peter, and especially as one writing these words in the presence of Peter in Rome, the comfort for Peter is especially powerful.⁴ Three denials of his Lord. But through Mark’s gospel, words of the angel were recorded for all posterity that he was forgiven of all his sins, and that his salvation was confirmed through the resurrection of his Lord!

Yet Mark is a unique figure in the New Testament because he had special double-relationships with the great apostles Peter *and Paul*. Barnabas and Peter recognized it before Paul. But Paul did come to that same conclusion, for from his house arrest (first Roman imprisonment), he brought a greeting to the Colossians from Mark himself (Col. 4:10, Phile. 24). Mark very well could have reached Rome in the same manner as Paul, on the ship that experienced great perils (Acts 27).

Nonetheless, he came to seek out Paul and support

him in the gospel ministry, and stayed until Peter came and wrote his epistles in Rome.

Upon Mark’s coming to Rome, ten years had passed since Paul and Barnabas argued over his reliability. Now he came to Paul to demonstrate a love for further missionary work. I can envision Paul and Mark reconciling their differences and grasping one another with their right hands of fellowship. What a beautiful thing when men can once again come to see one another as brothers in the Lord!

Paul’s new understanding that Mark was profitable for the gospel ministry was further strengthened during his second Roman imprisonment in AD 67. Facing execution under the cruel hands of Emperor Nero, a reflective Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus, and sought out Mark. “Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (II Tim 4:11). Mark had left Rome for Asia previously, but now was being remembered and sought out once again by Paul.

Remember, at one time, Paul and Barnabas had stood face to face in uncompromising stature, at odds over the reliability of Mark. Now Paul beckons for him, for his thoughts in his final penned chapter continued to be on those he loved, many who ministered to him during his time as a missionary and prisoner (II Tim. 4:9-22). And Mark makes the list.

We cannot be certain whether Mark made it to Rome in time to see Paul this last time, but we can be certain that Mark was such a man as described by Paul: profitable [useful], *and* faithful in his calling to the church.

What was the end of Mark? Tradition has cited martyrdom in the city of Alexandria (for it has been suggested he had a hand in the church’s origin), but his association with that city seems a likely concoction of the early church.⁵ It is difficult to solidify his time in Alexandria, but due to ease of travel, it is certainly plausible. If true, then he was profitable and reliable to the end, willing to give himself for the cause of Christ.

But remember the disagreement in Acts 15. The point was not whether Paul or Barnabas was right. Again, different perspectives using the same information. What was important was that in the end, Mark showed himself reliable. God used Mark to write a gospel account and provide spiritual support to both Peter and Paul.

Significantly, he understood through his associations with Peter and Paul the different perspectives of God’s people at that time: the Gentiles (through Paul’s influence as a missionary) and the Jews (through Peter’s min-

4 Kenneth Koole. “I know not the Man” (sermon preached July 11, 2021). <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SD=71121152955723>

5 F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 419.

istry in Judea). Gentiles and Jews holding different perspectives themselves—yet *one* as a body of Christ. This balance God used in Mark for the good of His church. And through our study of Mark, we have seen some-

thing of Barnabas. He was a man who saw something special in Mark, for Barnabas was a man of second chances. To him we turn next time.



Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Constantinople (680): Meeting

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2023, p. 258.

Our last article noted that Jesus Christ has two wills, a divine will and a human will, both of which work in harmony with each other. Some in the early church had taught that Christ has only one will; these were Monothelites. These included the Emperor Heraclius, who was looking for political unity in his empire, and Pope Honorius, who supposedly spoke with apostolic authority. But Sophronius, who would later be the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Maximus the Confessor, staunchly defended the two-wills doctrine.

Meeting called

Emperor Heraclius and Pope Honorius had been of one mind in 640. Forty years later, Emperor Constantine IV and Pope Agatho also saw the matter eye to eye, but took exactly the opposite position to their predecessors. During his reign from 668-685, Emperor Constantine IV worked to smooth the troubled relationship between the Eastern and Western churches, and thought that asserting the doctrine of Christ's two wills would help. When Agatho became pope in 678, the two agreed that the emperor should call another ecumenical council.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council convened on November 7, 680, attended by over 170 bishops. It met in eighteen sessions (with breaks between them), and concluded its work in September 681.

Doctrine developed

Guided by Pope Agatho, the council upheld the teaching that Christ has both a divine will and a human will. At its eighth session, all of the bishops who were under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople confessed that in Christ are “two natural wills and two

natural operations.” The council spelled out the same more fully in a doctrinal statement that it ratified at its last (eighteenth) session. In that statement, the council said,

We declare that in him [Christ] are two natural wills and two natural operations indivisibly, inconvertibly, inseparably, inconfusedly, according to the teaching of the holy Father. And these two natural wills are not contrary the one to the other (God forbid!) as the impious heretics assert, but his human will follows and that not as resisting and reluctant, but rather as subject to his divine and omnipotent will.¹

The doctrinal statement also reaffirmed the teachings of the previous five ecumenical councils. In other words, its decisions were a further development of what had been said in the past. The quote drives the point home. The Creed of Chalcedon had said that the two natures of Christ were united in His one person “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” The Sixth Ecumenical Council used the same terms to explain the relation of Christ's two wills. In other words, if Christ has two natures, He must have two wills. Later, the doctrinal statement indicated that the doctrine of Christ's two wills was not just abstract, but related to His saving work: “Wherefore, we confess two wills and two operations, concurring most fitly in him *for the salvation of the human race*.”²

1 Philip Schaff, ed, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 345.

2 Schaff, 14:346, italics added.

Heretics anathematized

Those who taught that Christ has only one will had appealed to some of the church fathers for support. The council investigated the writings of the church fathers, and found that the promoters of the one-will idea had misrepresented the fathers.

It is always a danger that we misread highly regarded theologians so that we can claim them on our side of an issue. Some men do so with an agenda, conscious that they are twisting another's words to help them win the day. This is a form of lying. Others do so unintentionally, but still bear responsibility for not carefully understanding another person's views before quoting that person.

George I, Patriarch of Constantinople, had held to the Monothelite view, but changed his mind during the meeting of the council. Macarius, Archbishop of Antioch, maintained his wrong view of the matter. The council let George stay in office, but deposed Macarius.

Then, during its thirteenth session, the Council anath-

ematized Honorius (the pope who half a century earlier had defended the Monothelite view) and others. The council worded the matter strongly: in its own letter to Pope Agatho, it said that it “slew them with anathema, as lapsed concerning the faith and as sinners...outside the camp.”³ It declared a pope to be excommunicated for a doctrinal teaching! When a later Roman pope ratified the decisions of this council, he in effect acknowledged that popes could err even in doctrinal matters. It raises the question, if even Rome recognizes that some of her popes have erred in their teachings, how can they view the popes as successors of the apostles?

The church spoke clearly: Monothelism was not a genuine expression of the Christian faith. The teachings of the Monothelites persisted for some time, but not within the Romish church and not within the Byzantine empire.

³ Schaff, 14:349.



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 (10)

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2022, p. 16.

That the missionary should strive to establish an indigenous church which is self-supporting, self-governing (in the biblical sense), and self-propagating is certainly correct, biblical methodology. With this no one ought [to] have any quarrel.¹

Previous articles in this series have shown that we may certainly agree with Prof. Decker's statement that there ought to be no quarrel against this correct, biblical methodology regarding the goal of foreign mission work. We have shown in previous articles by an overview of some historical examples that this biblical methodology has been widely received and successfully implemented, through the Lord's indispensable blessing and guidance, by Reformed and Presbyterian foreign

missions. Even so, there has been misunderstanding and opposition regarding this biblical methodology over the years.

The first example is the idea that there is a particular shortcoming in the existing number of elements of the three-self formula. It is argued that the three-self formula would become complete with the addition of a fourth element, called “self-theologizing.” This element of “self-theologizing” was noted as occurring in non-western countries where the new churches studied Scripture and began developing their own theology. Noted missiologist, Paul G. Hiebert, encouraged this additional element in emerging churches with the optimistic outlook that this new element “promises a better understanding of God's Word than Western cultures have produced over several hundred years of church

¹ Prof. Robert D. Decker, “Missionary Methods (14),” *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 58 (20):465.

history.”² Thus, successful missions apparently occurs when young churches in non-western cultures develop their own theology by themselves, rather than merely importing theology and confessions from outside their own nations and cultures.

A second example is the dismissal altogether of the concept of the three-self formula and its replacement with a new paradigm for missions and churches. The development of a local church through foreign missions should be guided by a new paradigm of “the Church Test, the Kingdom Test, and the Gospel Test.” This paradigm focuses more on the outcomes and progress of the Christian church’s mission work in the nations and cultures of the world.

“The Church Test” for healthy Christian missions is met when “there is a corporate witness for Jesus inherent in the culture, where we can observe the ‘presence of a community of people willing to bear the name of Christ, and “Israel” that maintains his worship’ as a called-out people.”³ While this description is not easy to understand, it means that healthy and successful mission work results in conversions, baptisms, and the development of many congregations in a particular field of labor.

“The Kingdom Test” is met when “evidences of reformation, renewal, and revival” are noticed in the broader society in which mission stations and new churches exist. These evidences will apparently show that the “kingdom rule of God is holding sway especially when the impact of Christian values and virtues moves beyond the confines of the church to touch the broader community.”⁴ Apparent evidences of the progress of the kingdom into the world and its culture are a bold and forceful Christian witness, an address of social injustices, administration of comfort to the socially oppressed, and confrontation of evil in all areas of society in order to bring broader community under the lordship of Jesus.

“The Gospel Test” is met when the gospel of Jesus is having a noticeable effect on the society in which the missionary labors. “Wherever the disproportionate influence of believers responding to the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus effectively calls a culture to increasingly righteous and just living, the Gospel Test is being met.”⁵ In other words, the Gospel Test is met

when Christians and Christianity are dominating the structures of that particular culture in which the mission work is being done.

Thus, this three-fold “Test” paradigm is promoted as a way for faithfulness in mission work in the world’s nations and cultures by gauging the outcomes of the work in light of its objectionable views about the kingdom of Christ and its coming in the New Testament age.

A third example of opposition to the three-self formula is the dismissal of one or two of the elements of the three-self formula as unnecessary. In one example, the matter of “self-support” is opposed by the alleged basis that the churches in Judea received financial aid from the church in Antioch. It is argued that self-support only applies to those places where it is economically possible, but it does not apply to situations where it appears economically impossible. Thus, members of local churches need not give anything at all to the support of the ministry of the gospel and the operating expenses of the church (General Operations Fund) nor to benevolence if it is determined that those members or churches are poor.⁶ As a result, missionaries are not required to exhort and teach the members of a mission station to give anything sacrificially as a royal priesthood from their thankful hearts, minds, and hands if they live in some measure of poverty. The mission stations in poor countries may be exhorted to expect that the financial support for ministry of their pastors will come from foreign sources and that their benevolence will come entirely from wealthy, foreign sources. As a result, missionaries, in certain circumstances, may teach and train mission stations to be self-governing and self-propagating, but not necessarily self-supporting. Is that correct, that a missionary trains a mission station to have one, but not necessarily the other aspects of the three-self formula?

A final example of opposition to the traditional understanding of the three-self formula is the attempt to maintain the self-propagation element, but with a new interpretation from what this element originally meant. The term originally meant that the church through its institutional offices, as supported spiritually and financially by the office of believers, preaches the Word of God so that it may be spread and thereby believers and their seed may be added unto the Lord in an instituted church.

However, recently a South Korean Presbyterian theologian, Dr. John H. Oak, argued that the work of self-propagation is the official work of every member of the church. He taught that all of the members of

2 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insight on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 85.

3 John Rowell, *To Give or Not to Give?* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic Publishing, 2006), 75.

4 Rowell, 76.

5 Rowell, 77.

6 Rowell, 39.

the church “are on a par with the clergy in the body of Christ. They, too, have received their call from the Lord, who is the head of the church.”⁷ Oak asserted that every member of the church has been appointed to the official calling to preach, evangelize, and counsel in the name of Christ as much as those with a theological training and ordination.

Oak then taught that mature Christians and church members fulfill their duty of official preaching most effectively by discipleship training. He taught that “discipleship training is not just one of many ministry methods that we can choose. Discipleship training corresponds to the essence of the visible church and is the sole model that Jesus exemplified and commanded.”⁸ One main feature of successful discipleship training is “the principle of concentration.” This means that every mature member as pastor should have in his or her classes of discipleship only a few people, preferably a maximum of twelve people like the number of Jesus’ disciples.⁹ According to Oak, this is the chief means of grace for the gathering and building up of the church institute, and this methodology of discipleship training in small groups fulfills the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20.

To lend validity to his type of self-propagation, Oak demonstrated that churches who followed his methodology would be very successful. While numerical growth has been shunned as the focus of discipleship training, Oak at the same time prophesied that those who follow his methodology will “multiply the church.”¹⁰ Oak even demonstrated by specific examples that those churches which implemented his methodology experienced numerical growth as well as a positive impact in their local society through various community service projects.¹¹

In response, we oppose these examples of resistance to the proper understanding of the three-self formula. In the first place, the addition of “self-theologizing” might at first glance seem to be legitimate. The goal of a missionary in his instruction is certainly not that the new converts merely embrace what the missionary says robotically or simply because the missionary is more educated than they are. Rather, the goal of the missionary in his instruction is that, like the Berean Christians, the new converts may embrace the instruction of the Word

of God, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and by the illuminating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit, embrace the truth, both objectively and subjectively, by a living faith as their very own spiritual heritage. In other words, a missionary’s goal is that the new converts do their own work of developing their understanding of Reformed theology.

Nevertheless, this attempted insertion of a new element of “self-theologizing” is logically redundant since it falls under the umbrella of self-propagation. The goal of self-propagation is the establishment of churches in the Word of God and the Reformed faith so that they in turn can themselves preach the same Word of God according to the Reformed faith.

More concerning is what the attempted insertion of an additional element of “self-theologizing” really means. What it really means is that the new converts on a mission field in their own culture must develop their own, home-grown theology. They should not “import” the Middle Eastern, North African, Greek, French, Dutch, German, and English confessions into their confessional heritage as their own. While they may refer occasionally to those historic Reformed confessions, they as “self-theologizing” churches must create their own confessional heritage that fits their own culture.

This idea is erroneous because it undermines the catholicity of the historic, Christian faith. The truth of the Reformed faith, which is the truth of Scripture, transcends culture and language because it is the catholic truth of Jesus Christ, our Chief Prophet and Teacher, whose elect He gathers by His Word and Spirit from the nations of the earth. The truth of Scripture as set forth in the Reformed Confessions does apply to all men in all nations and must be preached in all nations. A “self-theologizing” church according to the modern, innovative sense of the word, is a church that heads down the path of a rejection of the Word of Christ and the Reformed confessions and one that sets a perilous course of drifting on the tempestuous seas of apostasy.

Secondly, the use of a better standard for the health and sustainability of a local church is problematic. The three-fold “Test” paradigm focuses on the results. If that is how one measures successful missions and then applies that to the work of Christ Himself in His ministry, He would measure up as a complete failure. In His death, all forsook Him and fled away from Him. The outward result of His preaching was that a small remnant was gathered. The same was true for the apostles.

Furthermore, the three-fold “Test” paradigm forgets that the Lord’s intention and the Lord’s results with faithful preaching is not only the gathering of the elect,

7 John H. Oak, *Called to Awaken the Laity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 9.

8 Oak, 275.

9 Oak, 185.

10 Oak, 160.

11 Oak, 302.

but also the hardening and rejection of the reprobate. The Lord's intention with the preaching through history is that the church usually appears as a small remnant. Rather than focus on the outcomes and results of her work, the church must faithfully examine according to Scripture, the Confessions, and the Church Order whether her work is in harmony with the ordinances of Christ.

Thirdly, equating the witness of the individual Christian in the element of "self-propagation" with the official administration of the Word of God by the preaching is unbiblical. The Scriptures do not teach that every member of the church has been given the duties that God, according to I Timothy 3 and 4, assigns to ordained elders, deacons, and pastors. Instead, the Scriptures do teach the important but subordinate relation of the witness of the individual Christian with regard to the preaching of the gospel.

One of several examples in Scripture of this relation is given in John 4. When the Samaritan woman went

into the city to witness to her acquaintances about Jesus and His words to her at the well of Sychar, the other Samaritans embraced what the woman witnessed concerning Jesus the Messiah. However, after the Samaritans also themselves heard Christ later, they said unto the Samaritan woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." (John 4:42) The witness of the Samaritan woman was a subordinate instrument to the official ministry of Jesus Christ in the gathering of His sheep and lambs in that Samaritan town.

Finally, opposition to all, or even one element, of the three-self formula lacks the support of Holy Scripture. There is evidence in the book of Acts that the early New Testament churches, even within the early years after Pentecost, manifested the three aspects of the three-self formula in their threefold unity. In our next and concluding article in this series, we will observe some of these examples.



Strength of youth

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, Michigan

The true freedom of the will

But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign, in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore unless the admirable Author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin

Canons of Dordt, Heads III/IV, Article 16

Dear believing young person,

Do you know that God has given you a freed will? No, you do not have a free will in an Arminian sense, but you have a *freed* will. That you have a freed will means that you by the grace of God can *choose* to do good! That means you can *decide* to do what is right and *resolve* against doing what is wrong. That means you can *will* to follow God's Word instead of your feelings. That means you must and you will try hard, put forth effort, and discipline yourself to make progress in your Christian walk. God has freed your will that was once in bondage to sin.

Within the human soul, we can identify three faculties: the thinking, the feeling, and the willing. The thinking faculty is often referred to as the intellect. The feeling faculty is the emotion. The willing faculty is called volition. The latter is our focus.

When God created man, He created human beings

with a volition or a will. This is part of being a human being. When the human race fell in Adam, it is important to know that human beings remained, well...human beings. Although mankind lost the image of God, took on the image of Satan, and become totally depraved, he did not lose his ability to think, to feel, or to will. Under the power of the devil, fallen man can only think sinfully, feel sinfully, and will sinfully; yet mankind retains a will because that is simply part of being human. His will is in bondage to sin, but he retains his will.

To put it concretely, when an unregenerate young person gets drunk, watches pornography, goes to bed with someone of the same sex, or engages in any other sin, he truly *wants* to do so. The sinner is not forced to sin against his will. In his pitiful condition under the power of the devil, the unregenerate can only sin, and yet he sins because he wants to sin.

While retaining his will, man's will is in bondage to sin. Unless he is regenerated, fallen man can only will to sin. This must be made clear against the error of Arminianism. This proud heresy teaches that the will of unregenerate man is free—'free' in the sense that his will is neutral; man is able choose good or evil. The Arminian believes that with his free will he can accept God's grace or resist God's grace. When Christ by His Holy Spirit wants to save a man's soul, the deliverance of that soul ultimately depends on whether the free will accepts or resists God's help. In the end, the determining factor in whether a person is converted is man's free will instead of God's sovereign will. Against this error, the Reformed position is that the will of fallen man is in bondage to sin, and therefore utterly incapable of choosing good unless God by sovereign irresistible grace works in him.

An important facet of Arminianism is pointed out in the Canons' "Rejection of Errors": "We reject the errors of those who teach: That in the true conversion of man no new qualities, power, or gifts can be infused by God into the will..." (Canons, Heads III/IV, Rejection of Errors 6). According to the Arminian, the will of man is a domain that God does not enter by sovereign grace; when man turns from unbelief to faith, therefore, he does so of his own free will. The Canons reject this error, declaring that God by irresistible grace *does* infuse new qualities into our will at conversion. God produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

Here is the crux of the matter, young person. Here is the ground where we must do many theological battles. The question is this: In the process of converting man's soul, does God change man's will by infusing new qualities into that will? Or does God leave man's will un-

touched? Arminianism answers: God leaves man's will untouched—'free' from God's sovereign control and able both to choose or to resist His grace.

However, there is another system of false doctrine that holds to the same error. There is another proud heresy that would insist that God leaves man's will untouched. It is sometimes called antinomianism. It is sometimes called hyper-Calvinism. It is sometimes called the truth of the Reformed faith, though it is not.

The real truth of the Reformed faith is that when God converts the heart of His elect child, He actually changes the will. We are not saved or regenerated by free will (as Arminianism claims), but we are saved *unto a freed will*. This occurs when God regenerates and brings to faith:

"... [He] by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions" (Canons, Heads III/IV, Art. 11).

Article 16 of the same heads of the Canons says this about God's work upon the will: "...[He] spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign, in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist." (Canons, Heads III/IV, Art. 16).

If God has truly regenerated you, then your will is freed! Your will is freed from bondage to sin so that you are able to choose the good and hate the evil. So sweet and powerful is the saving grace of the Holy Spirit in His people that they are made willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3). So wonderfully irresistible is Christ's grace that when He works upon our hearts at regeneration and all through our life, He makes us "sincerely willing and ready to live unto Him" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1). We are not utterly or completely passive; rather, Christ's Spirit makes us willing in our believing, willing in our repenting, and willing in our obeying.

This is not due to man's own natural moral ability at any point, even after regeneration. If left to himself, to contribute just a little of his own accord, a regenerated man will revert back to choosing only evil. But Christ's saving work is so powerful that, from regeneration through glorification, He will not leave man's will untouched and in bondage to sin. Instead, the Holy

Spirit infiltrates our will, freeing us to want what Christ wants.

To put it concretely, after a young person has been regenerated, God so works upon the will of that young person that he genuinely wants to read his Bible and pray, even disciplining himself to do so. When he goes to church, he genuinely wants to worship Christ, even making choices the night before so that he is awake and mentally ready on the Sabbath. When he faces temptation on his device, he actually decides to resist, even deciding to get a reliable person to hold him accountable. By the pervading power of the Holy Spirit, the regenerated person has self-control that battles his sinful lusts, denies his old man, and wills to do right. When he does any of this, the regenerated person is not forced against his will by the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Spirit infuses new qualities into the will so that the young person is rightly said to make the right choice. Then with sincerity he sings,

With steadfast courage I design
No wrong to speak or do;
Thy path of life I choose for mine
And walk with purpose true.
For help, O God, I cry to Thee,
Assured that Thou wilt answer me.

Psalter # 32, stanza 2

Strange notions that deny this true freedom of our wills are creeping into Reformed churches. There are variations to this heresy. There are some who insist that the regenerate are like pieces of wood (stocks and blocks), who simply *do not have a will*. Christ's work of conversion and sanctification is erroneously compared to a landscaper going to a job site, loading pieces of wood and stone into a truck, and transporting them where they need to go. So also Christ is said to carry His people like such stocks and blocks when He translates them out of darkness into light. Thus, our wooden hearts simply have no will upon which He works.

Another variation of this error is that the will of the regenerate *remains in bondage to sin*. According to this error, the regenerate person has a will, but he still

can only want evil as was the case before regeneration. Those who believe this error choose to ignore the truth that Christ by His Spirit effectually renews the will so that the believer himself is actually made active and properly said to repent, believe, and obey, "by virtue of that grace received" (Canons, Heads III/IV, Article 12).

A third variation of this error is that the will of the regenerate is *freed...to do whatever he feels* and whatever he claims his conscience dictates. This error holds to an unbiblical idea of freedom or liberty. The world's notion of liberty is that man is free to do whatever is right in his own eyes. Those who claim such freedom are in reality still in bondage to the selfishness of sin. The true freedom of the will consists not in being made free to do whatever we like, but in being made free from self-service to the service of Christ according to His Word.

Practically speaking, these errors that deny the true freedom of the will lead God's people, particularly young people, to be stagnant and passive in their Christian walk. Ignoring the powerful, irresistible work of the Spirit upon the will, the young person shrugs his shoulders as he continues in impenitent drunkenness, pornography, or some other addictive sin far too common in Reformed churches. "If God changes me, then I will change." This is the passive and fatalistic mindset of one who holds to this error. "Do not tell me *I* am required to repent, or *I* must cease from my evil works, or *I* must obey." Rejecting the truth of the true freedom of the will, young people imagine that God takes them to heaven without changing their stubborn wills to submit to Him. That is far from biblical and Reformed truth.

Dear young person, do you believe in the true Jesus Christ? The true Jesus is such a great Savior that He has finished obeying God's law *for* you, and He has finished suffering God's judgment *for* you. But the true Jesus also works irresistibly *in* your will, to free that will from bondage to sin, so that you want to live unto Him in thanks. "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). This is the freeing work of the true Christ. May He bend your will to repent and believe in Him.

Report of Classis East

Meeting of January 11, 12, and March 15, 2023

Grandville PRC warmly welcomed the thirty-eight delegates from the nineteen member churches of Classis East on Wednesday January 11, 2023. After doing more work on January 12, classis decided to recess until Wednesday, March 15. What follows is a brief summary of the "Acts" of Classis East.

Wednesday morning—January 11, 2023

Rev. Jacob Maatman, chairman of the previous meeting of Classis East, led in opening devotions. He then read the credentials of the delegates from the sending consistories. Classis approved the credentials, and Rev. Maatman declared classis legally constituted. The next

minister in line (alphabetically by last name), Rev. J. Mahtani assumed the chair for the meeting.

Four elders and one deacon, attending classis for the first time, signed the Formula of Subscription.

Classis approved the minutes of its September 14-15, 2022 meeting.

The chairman asked the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order, which the delegates answered satisfactorily.

The Stated Clerk (secretary), Classical Committee, and Church Visitors each presented a report. Classis approved the work of these functionaries/committees.

A special committee of classis appointed to investigate an abuse case read its report. The chairman ruled that this report would be handled by a committee of pre-advice.

Classis received a letter from the consistory of First PRC of Holland Michigan requesting that classis “proclaim a special day of prayer...in response to both recent and past cases of abuse in our denomination.” The chairman ruled that the letter would be treated by a committee of pre-advice.

After taking care of the above matters, the chairman appointed nine committees of pre-advice to study and bring recommendations regarding the matters on the agenda.

In closed session classis treated two requests from consistories for advice regarding discipline cases. In one case, classis advised a consistory to proceed with the announcement of an impenitent member’s name to the congregation per Article 77 of the Church Order. In the other case classis advised a consistory to proceed with the erasure of an impenitent baptized member.

Wednesday afternoon—January 11, 2023

Committee I presented advice regarding an appeal concerning an abuse case. This case was treated in closed session. For more information about this case see the summary of the March 15 session.

First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids submitted a letter notifying Classis East of the resignation of Rev. Rodney Kleyn (ordained in 2002). Classis East approved the work of the consistory in connection with Rev. Kleyn’s resignation.

Providence PRC sought the approval of Classis for an overture to be brought to synod to hire an independent third party to investigate sexual abuse in the PRCA. Classis declared this overture legally before the body.

Classis approved a pulpit supply schedule for three vacant churches in the East (First GR, Georgetown, and Hudsonville) and appointed ministers to provide pulpit supply for Hull PRC of Classis West.

Grace PRC asked and received permission from Classis East to distribute a letter of clarification to address inaccurate language that was used in a report that was distributed by Classis East in January of 2022.

Classis failed (voted against) a recommendation “not to accede to the request that Classis call a special day of prayer.”

Wednesday evening—January 11, 2023

Classis opened the evening session by adopting a recommendation to declare a special day of prayer on January 31, 2023 “in response to past cases of abuse in our denomination.”

Classis treated advice to approve the overture of Providence PRC to recommend that synod hire an independent third party to investigate abuse in the PRCA. Classis decided to recommit the advice for reformulation.

Classis approved a motion to reconvene at 10:00 A.M. on January 12, 2023. The script minutes of the day were read and adopted.

Thursday morning—January 12, 2023

In closed session classis treated the advice of Committee I regarding an abuse case (more information is in the report of the March 15 session, which follows).

Regarding the overture of Providence PRC classis approved the following recommendations:

That Classis East appoint a special committee *to give more definition to the overture in order to submit it as a classis to Synod 2023*. The work of the committee shall include:

- Clearly define a scope of work.
- Research and vet third-party organizations and bring a recommendation to classis.
- Address possible church political matters concerning implementation of the proposal. Carried

It is moved to authorize the necessary expenses that the committee incurs in carrying out its work. Carried

That the committee be composed of Mike Potjer, Bernie Kamps, Rev. Eriks, Rev. Maatman, Tom Bergman, Rev. McGeown, and Mike Gritters. Carried

That Classis reconvene March 15 at which the committee shall bring its proposal to classis to forward to Synod 2023. Carried

Classis approved the subsidy requests of Kalamazoo, Pittsburgh, and Providence PRCs and forwarded the requests to Synod 2023 for final approval.

Thursday afternoon—January 12, 2023

The expenses of the sessions of January 11 and 12 totaled \$1,629.87.

Classis appointed Rev. Spronk to another three-year term as stated clerk.

Classis once again spent time in closed session deliberating on the abuse case.

Classis directed the Classical Committee to appoint a committee to help a consistory with an abuse case.

Classis elected the following men:

Elder *primi* delegates to synod: Randy Dykstra, Joel Minderhoud, Tim Pipe Jr., John VanBaren, Dan VanUffelen; *secundi*: Andy Bylsma, Josh Hoekstra, Steve Kuiper, Peter VanDerSchaaf, and Dirk Westra.

Minister *primi* delegates: Revs. Decker, Eriks, Langerak, Mahtani, and Spronk; *secundi*: Bruinsma, Dykstra, McGeown, Noorman, Smidstra

Synodical deputies from the East are the following (with year term expires in parenthesis), *primi*: Revs. Decker (2024), Mahtani (2025), and Spronk (2026); *secundi*: Revs. J. Holstege (2024), Smidstra (2025), and Noorman (2026).

The Classical Committee: Revs. Lee (2024), Smidstra (2025), and J. Holstege (2026).

The church visitors are Revs. R. Dykstra and W. Langerak with alternates Revs. Eriks and Spronk.

Classis adopted a motion to recess until March 15. The script minutes of the day were read and adopted.

Wednesday morning—March 15, 2023

The Stated Clerk reported on his labors since the last session of classis. Classis approved his work.

Classis received minority and majority reports regarding the overture of Providence PRC. Before deliberations on these reports, classis approved a motion to vote on the overture by secret ballot. To read the majority and minority reports see: <http://www.prc.org/about/church-government/classis-east/item/6402-classis-east-report-january-11-12-and-march-15-2023>.

The majority and minority reports were read on the floor of classis.

Classis adopted the majority report, which recommended “that Classis East *not* approve the overture of Providence PRC that the PRCA commission a full, independent, third party investigation and assessment of sexual abuse in the PRCA.”

Wednesday afternoon—March 15, 2023

Classis treated a report from the committee appointed to assist a consistory with an abuse case in closed session. Classis approved the request of the committee to continue its work.

Classis approved a motion to publish closed session minutes from the January 11 meeting on the ground that “The decisions which were made in response to Mrs. VanDyke’s appeal set important precedent in the churches. The decisions set precedent for how cases of sexual abuse must be handled by the churches and what information must be communicated by consistories to their congregations. It is important that the membership of the denomination have access to this information.” To read these decisions, use the link to the minutes of the meeting found on the PRCA website listed above under Wednesday morning.

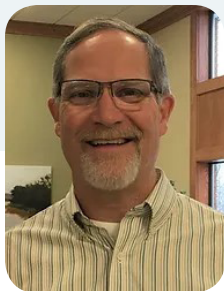
Expenses for the March 15, 2023 meeting totaled: \$2,549.47.

Rev. Mahtani reported that he thanked the caterers.

Faith PRC offered to host classis in May. Classis approved of the offer and will convene at 8:00 A.M. on May 10, 2023 at Faith PRC.

The script minutes were read and approved.

Classis adjourned around 2:30 P.M. and Rev. Mahtani closed with prayer.



News from our churches

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

PRC news (denominational)

On Friday night, March 31, Hull PRC witnessed and rejoiced in the installation of the thirteenth different pastor in her history, Rev. S. Regnerus, who came from Lynden PRC in Washington but grew up in that NW

Iowa area. Rev. A. Brummel of Calvary PRC (also in Hull) led the special service.

Meanwhile, Lynden PRC called Rev. M. DeBoer (Edgerton, MN PRC) on March 19 from a trio that included Revs. A. Brummel and M. Kortus (Hope PRC-Redlands, CA).

Rev. Kortus declined the call from Doon, IA PRC on March 19. On that same Sunday, Rev. J. Maatman (SE PRC-Grand Rapids, MI) declined calls from Hosanna (Edmonton, AB) and Hudsonville, MI PRCs.

In First PRC's (Grand Rapids, MI) latest call, Rev. J. Holstege (Zion PRC) accepted it on March 26.

On March 26, Randolph, WI PRC extended a call to Rev. N. Decker (Grandville-MI PRC) from a trio that included Revs. J. Maatman, and D. Noorman (Southwest PRC-Wyoming, MI).

Georgetown PRC's Consistory announced a new trio from which the congregation would call a new pastor: Revs. M. DeBoer, A. Spriensma, and D. Noorman. The congregation was to vote on April 10.

Hosanna PRC's Consistory also formed a new trio following Rev. Maatman's decline: Revs. N. Decker, Kortus, Mahtani (Hope PRC-Walker, MI). The congregation voted to call Rev. Decker on March 26.

Congregational news

In the Siouxland area (South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota), all the men of the area churches are invited to participate in a group study of I John 3 led by Rev. R. Barnhill at the Doon PRC on Monday, April 17. What a wonderful way to conclude the season! We hope there is a good turnout.

And, for the ladies in that region, Heritage PRC is hosting the Spring Ladies' League on Thursday, April 27.

Mention of Heritage PRC makes me ask our readers, Did you know that they hold a monthly "fellowship luncheon"? Their latest one was held April 2 after the morning service. Ah, the benefits of a smaller congregation.

And so, speaking of those benefits, consider what Hosanna PRC (Edmonton, AB) did back in late March: "The congregation [ages 12+] is invited to a Games Night at the Zeldenrust's on Friday, March 24th at 7:30 p.m. Please bring your favorite games, and a snack to share." What fun through more good fellowship!

Young people/young adult activities

While winter brings soup suppers to the agenda of young people fundraisers, spring brings breakfasts. Southwest PRC's young people held one on Saturday, March 11 at the church in Wyoming, MI. First PRC-Holland's young people have a Made-to-Order Breakfast planned for Saturday, April 15, from 7:30-10 A.M. at the church. If it's not too late to get there, be sure to get your order in!

The Crete PRC Young People's Society hosted an

Easter Singspiration on Sunday night, April 9. The goal was to bring "praise to God for the wonderful gift of our risen Savior." To which we add a hearty, "Amen"!

The Hull PRC Young Peoples' Society likewise sponsored a "Resurrection Singspiration" on April 9 in Hull church.

Young Calvinists (West Michigan) is hosting an Easter Singspiration for all young people and young adults at Zion PRC (Jenison, MI) on April 16 beginning at 7:45 p.m. "Grab a friend and join us in celebrating our risen Lord!"

Trinity PRC young people are sponsoring a Spikeball Tournament on Saturday, April 29, for \$50 per team at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville. High school age and up are invited to competitive or non-competitive divisions. To register, send an email to trinityprcspikeball@gmail.com.

The Young Adults Society of Hope PRC-Redlands, CA is excited and eager to host a retreat this summer at Luther Glen Camp. The dates are July 3-6 and the theme is "A Peculiar People: Living the Antithesis," with lectures and discussions surrounding that topic. Registration is now open! The form to register may be found on the Hope PRC website.

Library feature—Immanuel PRC, Lacombe, AB

With this news report we can continue our look at church libraries. Our featured one this time is Immanuel PRC's in Lacombe, AB, Canada. We thank Deb Bleyenbergh for taking the picture and writing up a brief description of the history of their library. Looking at Immanuel's recent bulletin, I saw this notice for the congregation about the 'new' library: "Just a reminder that our church library is now in operation! Books may be browsed and checked out after the second service each Sunday. A book drop basket will be available by the library door on Sundays for books being returned."

For many years, Immanuel PRC has had a church library in a small room off the narthex. However, since the available books were mainly theological reference material, our library has been largely unused and ignored.

Happily, this has all recently changed, thanks to a couple ladies who volunteered to start a church library committee.

With some funding from our Evangelism Com-



mittee, they were able to purchase two additional, sturdy bookshelves and a good number of new books from the Reformed Book Outlet. Most of the books purchased were for children and young adults in order to make our library more usable and exciting for the many young, avid readers of Immanuel.

After purchasing new books, the library committee

covered the softcover ones with contact paper and then put envelopes and check-out cards in all the available books.

From now on, our church library will be open for browsing following our afternoon service each week, and judging by how crowded the room was on the first Sunday of being open, these books will be well used!

Announcements continued

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathies to Mary Windemuller and her family in the death of her husband, **John Windemuller**. It is our prayer that they may receive comfort from the words of Christ our Savior in John 10:27-28: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Jordan Engelsma, Vice President

David S. Miedema, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathies to Rev. Carl and Mary Haak, Mark and Bethany Feenstra, Chad and Melanie Noorman, and many great grandchildren in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother, **Joyce Pastoor**. It is our prayer that they may receive comfort from the words of Christ our Savior in Revelation 3:21: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

Jordan Engelsma, Vice President

David S. Miedema, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC in Walker, MI express their Christian sympathy to Pastor Jon Mahtani and Keri and their children in the death of Keri's grandmother, **Mrs. Joyce Pastoor**. May they be comforted with the words of Jesus Christ: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Dave Kamps, Vice-President

Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 10, 2023 at 8:00 A.M., in the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 10, 2016.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk