

The Standard Bearer

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Christ's instruction for temple builders

Rev. Dennis Lee

Preview of Synod 2023 of the PRCA

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

The Chosen television series

Rev. Nathan Decker

The ordo salutis: Calling

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The Belgic Confession and missions

Rev. Daniel Kleyn



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Editorial office

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

Business office

Mr. Dwight Quenga
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
dwight@rfpa.org

United Kingdom office

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

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Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Kalamazoo PRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Christ's instruction for temple builders

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

Zechariah 4:6-10

Temple builders! You and I have been called by God unto service in the greatest building project of all time: the construction of the church of God! What a privilege it is that you and I, creatures of the dust and sinful besides, would be used by God in this wonderful project!

The difficult task

We need to be encouraged in this work because the task to which we have been called is difficult.

God's people in the time of Zechariah had been appointed to this task by God. From their viewpoint, it all started to come their way during the reign of Cyrus, the ruler of the mighty Persian world empire. In 538 BC, the Lord turned the heart of this godless king to decree that the exiles of Israel be allowed to return to their homeland. That ended their 70 long years of captivity. The captive elect remnant of God was astounded by the news! With joy, this tiny remnant of God's people returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, leaving behind the riches and comforts of wealthy Babylon in exchange for the rubble and ruins of Jerusalem. Before them was a scene of utter devastation and destruction. A major rebuilding project was before them. They were to repair

the broken walls of the city, rebuild the city, and most of all, the temple, which had been totally destroyed. Without delay, they proceeded with the work of rebuilding and completed the temple's foundation in two years.

But the work came to a screeching stop thereafter for about fifteen years in the face of much opposition from their hostile neighbors, the Samaritans. If they were to continue with the work, they would have to do it without a completed wall and without a strong military presence to protect them. They would also have to go against the wishes of their powerful ruler Artaxerxes, whom the Samaritans had convinced to oppose their rebuilding labors.

To be sure, even without the external opposition they were facing, the task of rebuilding was a difficult one. For there were many discouragements they faced from within. Surely they were discouraged by their limited manpower. Only a small remnant of the large number of Israelites had returned from Babylon. Besides, they also had only limited resources for their labors.

Furthermore, they knew that no matter what they did, the building, when completed, would be a pale shadow of the stunningly beautiful and glorious temple that once stood there, Solomon's temple! In a word, their temple-building task was undertaken in an environment and age known as "*the day of small things*" (v. 10). Small number of laborers! Small amount of resources! Small and insignificant temple!

It is not so different with us today, is it? Though there are some differences in details, the task of temple building in our day and environment is also difficult! And like them, we too have our own set of discouragements and difficulties. Temple building, which for us is the building up of the faithful local church and denomination of churches, is a difficult task! And we too labor in a "day of small things." The faithful church and churches to which we belong are small and struggling. And unless the Lord wills differently, we expect to remain small as we continue maintaining hard and unpopular biblical doctrines and practices. But this is quite all right because the Lord does not despise "the day of small things." Unfaithfulness is what He despises!

In the task of church building, we are looking for growth—*spiritual* and *numerical*. And with regard to both kinds of growth, we face very real difficulties and discouragements.

This is true for *numerical* growth in both internal and external aspects. Internally, there is no guarantee that our children will continue in our churches and raise their families there. This is simply a fact, and happens in spite of the good parental upbringing and Christian education we give them over the years. Externally, various activities including community Bible studies and timely topical speeches are organized. But how many visitors have actually come to them?

Discouragements are also experienced with regard to *spiritual* growth. So often, we are struck by just how “small” the beginning of our new obedience in Christ is when the same besetting sins and weaknesses keep manifesting themselves among us.

All these are great discouragements indeed!

The important instruction

So, how was Zerubbabel able to succeed in his day, and how are we today going to be able to carry out our God-given task?

We are to do so by giving heed to the important instruction for temple building that Christ gives His people down through the ages: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit” (v. 6). This instruction was delivered through Zechariah, and was given to Zerubbabel in relation to the fifth vision given to the prophet recorded in Zechariah 4. That vision contained a familiar part and an unfamiliar part.

The familiar part featured one of the three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place of the temple, the seven-branched candlestick. This represents the church of God in the world. Together with the altar of incense and the table of shew bread, it spoke of the church living in sweet communion with God. Further, we are told that it was made of gold, which symbolizes great preciousness. This tells us that God deems His church in the world to be precious—and that includes small churches! Dare anyone despise a small but faithful church? And then there are the lamps on the candlestick giving off light. This speaks of the church’s calling to give off the light of the gospel of God in the midst of a dark and sinful world, doing so by bearing witness to it with both our lives and our mouths.

In order to continue doing that, the candlestick needed oil, which represents the Holy Spirit. Without the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we believers and officebearers would be spiritually impotent and useless to God. But with it, we are able not only to fellowship

with God, but also to shine as bright lights for Him in our labors and witness for Him in every office we occupy (including that of the believer) and in every sphere of life. Still more, there was a bowl above the light that carried a *constant* supply of oil in order for the candle stick to give off light *continually*. This speaks of our calling to be *constantly dependent* on the oil of the Holy Spirit in order that we cease not living for Jesus and serving Him in our hearts and lives!

But the vision also featured something unfamiliar to Zechariah: the two olive trees. Zechariah shows that he is not familiar with it by asking “What are these?” Eventually, the angel tells him that they are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord and are appointed to *lead* God’s people in the task of temple building. In his day, they represented Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, the God-appointed governor of God’s people. Today, the unchanging God still uses olive trees, His appointed officebearers among His people to lead in the task of temple building. With these special gifts of God-ordained officebearers together with the outpouring of the Spirit upon us, members of the church are equipped to join in the task of building up the body of Christ according to the measure of grace poured out upon them.

The important instruction for us who are called to serve and be active temple builders in Him is: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit.”

That means that we are not to depend on nor use means and methods for the task of church building that are based on human wisdom and strength. Depend not on the charisma of any preacher or leader! Change not the teaching and message that is preached! Replace not, nor even dilute, the preaching! And let us perform none of our God-given labors dependent on our own strength, power, and wisdom!

Rather, depend on the Spirit of Christ and use only the means and methods He is pleased to use! Use the means of His Word and prayer! Receive the faithful preaching of His Word. Speak the word of truth in love one to another in the church, and then to those outside the church, to those who know not Christ. Pray and pray without ceasing! And yes, adopt that one and only method of church building: *service*. *Serve* Him in areas where you have been gifted and grow in your service of Him. Do these things in the strength of His Spirit, trusting Him with all your heart and be not discouraged. Be not discouraged by the seeming slowness of progress. Be not discouraged by setbacks that come your way. Be not discouraged by the fact that we labor in “the day of small things.” This is God’s work. The fruits of those labors come in His time. And He makes all things beautiful in His time!

The reassuring promise

God well understands that we are weak and easily feel discouraged. So along with His instruction, He gives a reassuring promise to Zerubbabel and to temple builders of all ages.

In Zerubbabel's day, God affirmed Zerubbabel's appointed place in the work through the two olive trees in the vision: *he* was one of them! He assured him that those who oppose him will become as a flattened plain and that he who began the temple building project will one day *complete* it: the top stone, or final stone of the temple will be laid (v. 7).

So also, God encourages us as a church of Jesus Christ today. Amid all our difficulties and discouragements,

He shows us we have a place in His church-building project. We serve either as olive trees or as those who receive the oil of the Holy Spirit and who are called to give off gospel light! And there will come a day when all His and our enemies will become as a flattened plain, and when the last elect child of God will be born and gathered into His kingdom.

In the meantime, what must you do, dear reader? Build! Work! Serve! Do so in the strength and might of the Spirit of Christ, who is the Master Builder and Craftsman of His church! Do all His work “not by might, nor by power, but by” His Spirit, and be amazed that He is pleased to use you and to use me, weakest means, to fulfill His will!



Editorial

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

Preview of Synod 2023 of the PRCA

The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) will be hosted this year by Southwest PRC (Wyoming, MI). A pre-synodical worship service will be held on Monday evening, June 12, 2023, to beseech God for His blessing prior to taking up the work, and the twenty minister and elder delegates along with the five professor-advisors will gather to begin the work on Tuesday, June 13, at 8:00 A.M.

Three overtures and a protest

I believe it is safe to say that *the* issue presently on the hearts and minds of officebearers and members of the denomination is that of sexual abuse. That concern is reflected in the agenda for synod. The three overtures and one protest in the agenda all address in one way or another the subject of sexual abuse.

The agenda includes three overtures from consistories requesting that synod initiate certain new actions that they judge to be of importance for the churches.

One overture originated with the consistory of Zion PRC (Jenison, MI) and was approved by the meeting of Classis East on September 14, 2022. This overture asks synod “to appoint a study committee to develop the theoretical basis for dealing with abuse in the local congregation.” By theoretical, the overture has in

mind the “proper biblical and theological groundwork that could be used in the local congregations for developing their respective policies to deal with the serious practical issues of abuse in all its forms (sexual, spousal, parental, etc....).” The overture argues that a study committee could be helpful to establish a definition of abuse along with other associated terms, to work to distinguish a biblical and Christian viewpoint on abuse from the secular and cultural viewpoint on abuse, to indicate resources on this topic that are helpful and others that are problematic, and to establish fundamental guidelines that should be a part of every congregation's policy on abuse.

The other two overtures on the agenda both speak to the same issue: a request for synod to approve hiring an independent, third-party organization to conduct an investigation into how the denomination has handled cases of sexual abuse.

One of the overtures originated with the Consistory of Providence PRC (Hudsonville, MI), and was presented to a meeting of Classis East on January 12, 2023. Classis East put the matter into the hands of a special committee tasked with giving “more definition to the overture in order to submit it as a classis to Synod 2023.” At a special meeting on March 15, 2023, the

committee presented a majority and minority report. The majority report advised rejecting the overture, and Classis East adopted this recommendation. The Consistory of Providence, however, has exercised its right to present its overture to synod.

The second overture requesting a third-party investigation originated with the consistory of Covenant of Grace PRC (Spokane, WA), and was presented to a meeting of Classis West on March 1-2, 2023. Classis West did not approve the overture because “the overture has insufficient information for Classis to make an informed judgment to approve the request” and “the overture says almost nothing about what a third party is or what a third party would do.” Like the Consistory of Providence, the Consistory of Covenant of Grace is also exercising its right to present its overture to synod.

The agenda also includes a protest of a decision taken by last year’s synod. The decision in question was synod’s approval of “the work of its synodical deputies with regard to the deposition of Ronald VanOverloop for public, gross sins against the 6th, 7th, and 9th commandments.” To be clear, the protest does not argue that the former minister should not have been deposed. But the protest argues that synod should not have approved the work of the synodical deputies to depose a minister without any supplemental or background material other than a brief report of the deputies. According to the protestant, the lack of such material prevented synod from officially expressing grief to the victims as well as to the churches as a whole, and from considering whether it was necessary to conduct a further investigation into this particular case at a denominational, classical, and/or consistorial level.

I want to conclude this section by expressing what is and ought to be the desire of all: that God would humble us to acknowledge any ways in which we have failed as churches in our handling of abuse, have mercy upon us and forgive us of our sins, and strengthen us to move forward in a proper, healthy way.

Reports of standing committees

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

The 100th Anniversary Committee has been busy making arrangements for the 100th anniversary of our denomination to be held from June 23-27, 2025, at Calvin University with the theme “Grace: The PRCA at 100.” The main part of their report has to do with the appointing of individuals to various committees to work out the practical details of hosting the celebration.

The Board of Trustees reports on a number of significant items they have worked on in the past year. They have been working with a law firm based in Edmonton to request that the group calling itself “First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton” cease and desist in using the denomination’s name, since they no longer belong to the denomination. They report on a statement given to a local television station regarding the deposition of Mr. Ronald VanOverloop. They have been seeking advice from a law firm regarding our legal responsibilities and exposure in the event of misconduct by officers in our member churches. The committee also brings a proposal for a corporate restructuring of the denomination as a nonprofit organization in the state of Michigan. They also propose, if the corporate restructure is approved, that the name of the denomination be changed to the “Protestant Reformed Churches in the Americas.”

The Catechism Book Committee is responsible for overseeing the material used in catechizing the children and young people. The committee presents recommendations that synod make some minor modifications of wording to the questions and answers of the books for Juniors (grades 4-5) and Seniors (grades 6-7) Bible History.

The Contact Committee reports on visits to and interactions with our sister churches and other churches with whom we have varying levels of contact. One item worthy of mention in their report is the interactions of the delegation sent as observes to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). In its presentation the delegation was able to explain the schism that has troubled our congregations in the last few years. The delegation also observed that many of the other denominations reported on dealing with sexual abuse in their midst.

The Inter-Denominational Psalter Revision Committee—a combined labor of the Protestant Reformed, the Heritage Reformed, and Free Reformed churches—did not have the final version of the Psalter ready for the publication of the agenda, but was still hoping to send out a digital (pdf) version sometime in May.

The Protestant Reformed Psalter Revision Review Committee is a separate committee made up of members of the PRC who are reviewing the proposed revisions to the Psalter. The committee reports on the work it has done over the past year, and indicates that it plans to present a final product for approval to Synod 2024. They also make recommendations as to how to familiarize the denomination with the proposed final product.

The Domestic Mission Committee reports on the joy of having a new home missionary (Rev. J. Laning) and the work he and the calling church (Zion PRC) have

been doing since he took up the position at the beginning of the calendar year. The DMC also reports on its expansion of radio broadcasts into Detroit, MI and Greenville, SC, its ongoing work of revamping the denominational website (prca.org), and the writing of a mission manual.

The Foreign Mission Committee reports on the withdrawing of our two missionaries (Revs. D. Kleyn and R. Smit) from the mission field in the Philippines. This is due to our sister churches there being in a position to be self-governing and self-propagating, as well as the desire for their future seminary students to be instructed in our denominational seminary rather than by the missionaries. The Lord willing, Rev. R. Smit and his family will return from the field on June 5, and be available for a call in the denomination after July 15. Rev. D. Kleyn and his wife will remain for a bit longer to ensure a smooth handover of the work; he will be available for a call after September 1. As our work in the Philippines comes to a conclusion, we humbly pray that the Lord would bless the labors carried out there for the last twenty-two years.

The lack of a definite field of labor for our home missionary and the closing of our only ongoing field of labor in foreign lands ought to lead us as churches to pray more earnestly that the Lord would open up many opportunities both at home and abroad to spread the gospel. May we never become so insular and concerned about our own affairs that we lose sight of our calling to “go...and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

The Theological School Committee reports on the faithful labors of our professors, support staff, and students in the past year. Regarding professors, the TSC informs synod that the upcoming school year (2023-24) will be Prof. Cammenga’s final year of teaching, God willing. Regarding students, a matter for thanksgiving is the examination and anticipated graduation of our

fourth-year student, Mr. Matt Koerner. Mr. Koerner’s examination will likely stretch over parts of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and his graduation is scheduled for Thursday evening, June 15. The TSC is also recommending the admission of a young man into our seminary for the upcoming school year, which means that we will have one student preparing for the ministry in our churches in each of the four grade levels. While the number of vacancies at present is large, we can be thankful for a consistent stream of young men preparing for the ministry. The TSC also presents the following significant proposal regarding the admission of *older* men who feel called to the ministry:

In light of our current great need for pastors, we request synod to permit the TSC, in consultation with the faculty, to admit provisionally into the seminary older students, who lack all or some of the pre-seminary requirements, with a special program of study that is designed to make up for this lack but is somewhat less than the normal education for our ministers (a four-year undergraduate degree plus four-year seminary program). The specifics of such a program would be on a case-by-case basis, and depend on the student’s age, experience, educational background, gifts, etc. Formal admission and approval of the specific program would be sought at the following synod.

That sums up the more notable matters on the agenda. There are, of course, many other items on the agenda, all of which are important, but perhaps not all as noteworthy.

Please continue to pray for the needs of our churches as a whole, including the need for unity and peace in the truth. And please pray for the delegates that God would equip them with wisdom and strength to make good judgments that serve the well-being of the denomination.

Letters

Langberg and Grasso

Diane Langberg is a member of Calvary PCA in Willow Grove, PA, a member of a Reformed denomination that does not permit the ordination of women. She is also a psychologist and an author of numerous books on abuse. In the *SB*’s special issue, Langberg is the first author recommended in “Resources Related to Sexual Abuse. “I...

find her to be excellent,” writes Rev. Guichelaar, adding, “She specializes in trauma but she also has books on sexual and clergy abuse, which are obviously intimately related to the subject of trauma. If you want to help a friend or loved one, I would recommend her” (*SB*, vol. 98, No. 15 [May 1, 2022], 354).

In the April 15, 2021 issue of the *SB*, you write an editorial about how critical theory affects church

members' view of ecclesiastical authority, a worthy topic. But I am more interested in how church members are "legitimately confused and hurting" because of an abuse of power, something you promise to address next. In your editorial you include a footnote of what I assume are recommended sources. Among those is an article by Rev. Michael Grasso, an OPC pastor who is sharply critical of Langberg, albeit you add the caveat that you are "aware of criticisms of Grasso's work." Since Grasso's article has been shared throughout the PRCA, I want to respond to your indirect recommendation of Grasso's article, for Grasso puts Langberg into the Critical-Theory-Intersectionality-Feminist camp.

Your footnote mentions only part 1 of Grasso's article, but his real criticism of Langberg appears in parts 2-3. In a nutshell, Grasso fails to demonstrate that Langberg's legitimate criticism of church authority abused by certain leaders is the same thing as a rejection of and rebellion against all authority. If Langberg condemns some leaders as wolves, which Jesus Himself did, she is not calling all leaders such. Instead, Langberg emphasizes the necessity of humble servanthood in Christian leadership, something that Jesus Himself did and exemplified.

Grasso takes issue with a statement of Langberg: "The Son of man did not rule," as if this were a denial of Christ's lordship or kingship. Langberg herself explains, "although His disciples longed for Him to do so." Jesus did not rule in the way that His disciples wanted, namely, in an earthly kingdom. Grasso also interprets Langberg as teaching intersectionality and postmodernism because very early in her career she chose to listen to a female survivor of sexual abuse rather than heed the advice of her male supervisors that abused women tell "hysterical stories" and "lies about good men." Grasso's conclusion is, "Her choice to believe was greatly influenced by the gender of those she interacted with" and when "the oppressed class receives automatic deference because of intersectional identity, this moves into the realm of Critical Theory." So, Langberg's choice to believe an oppressed woman—thank God that she did and continues to do so!—is proof that she is a postmodern critical theorist.

In short, Grasso offers no proof that Langberg intends to destroy all authority structures or that she despises male headship in the home, church, and world. The citations from her book, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, do not prove his case. Rightly, Langberg is sharply critical of the abuse of power, but it is a stretch to conclude that she is a radical intersectional feminist and the *SB*

should not even indirectly promote an article that suggests she is.

In Christ,
Rev. Martyn McGeown,
pastor of Providence PRC

Response:

Dear brother,

Two brief comments in response to your letter.

First, you are correct that I referenced an article by Michael Grasso in a footnote to my editorial on critical theory, but you are not correct in concluding that this was a "recommended source," that this was an "indirect recommendation of Grasso's article," or that I was "indirectly promot[ing]" Grasso's work to readers of the *SB*. In the footnote, I began by saying "I relied heavily on the following articles," and then listed four other articles on critical theory that I found to be helpful, one of which was an article you had written. Then I wrote, "In the interests of full disclosure, I also gleaned a few bits of information from [Michael Grasso's article]" and ended by indicating "I am aware of criticisms of Grasso's work." The fact that I wrote what I did about Grasso's article should have indicated that I was not including it as a recommended resource like the other articles I had listed. The reason I included a reference to it at all was in the interests of intellectual honesty; I had read the article, gleaned a few tidbits of information about critical theory from it, and thought it necessary to acknowledge the source of that information. I would note also, as you do in your letter, that I referenced in the footnote just Part 1 of Grasso's work, the section that speaks generally of critical theory, and did not reference Parts 2 and 3, which is where the controversy lies. All of this hopefully makes clear that my brief footnote reference to an uncontroversial part of Grasso's work was not my recommending or promoting everything the man has written.

Second, it seems to me that the main point of your letter is not really to respond to my article but to respond to Grasso's articles on Diane Langberg. Since my editorial was not a promotion of Grasso's cause and was not in any way critical of Langberg, I have nothing to say in response.

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Joshua Engelsma



All around us

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville PRC in Grandville, Michigan

The Chosen television series

There is power in media to promote a message. Through television, film, radio, podcast, and social media, getting a message out to the masses has never been easier. And the platforms to receive the message are owned by almost everyone, as smartphones, tablets, and televisions are becoming ubiquitous. Many are the messages that are being promoted, so many of which are dangerous to the Christian and to the church. What I will address in this article is *The Chosen*, the television series about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Dramatic productions of biblical narratives, and more specifically of Jesus, have been around for a long time. A quick Google search will reveal that as long as there have been television and movies, there have been television and movies on scenes and themes lifted from the Bible. A notable example that many readers will remember was the 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*, funded and produced by the well-known actor Mel Gibson, in which the last twelve hours of Jesus' life are depicted by the actor Jim Caviezel. The film generated a massive response, from both non-Christian and evangelical circles. Among the latter group, some churches hosted viewings of the film, using it as a means to get the message of Jesus out to the masses. Other churches preached, wrote, and spoke against the film, warning Christians not to watch it. Undoubtedly the movie was extremely popular. To date, *The Passion of the Christ* is the highest-grossing R-rated film in the United States. Mel Gibson's 45-million dollar investment made him some 400 million dollars. Not only is there power to promote a message, but there is also money to be made in the process.

Rivalling the popularity of *The Passion of the Christ* is the current television series *The Chosen*, making it worthy of reflection today. *The Chosen* depicts the ministry of Jesus, particularly through the eyes of those whom He encountered during His life. The producer, Dallas Jenkins, put it this way, revealing in part his purpose in the production of the show: "We can dig deeper into the people who encountered Jesus, we can see their 'before,' and if the audience can see Jesus through

the eyes of those who met him, perhaps they can be changed in the same way."¹

There are several noteworthy things about *The Chosen*, all of which speak to its popularity and influence. First, how the show was financially funded was unprecedented. For the first season, over 10 million dollars was raised for the show's production and streaming. To date, over 40 million dollars has been raised to keep the show going, making it the largest crowd-funded media production in history.

Second, the show is being produced in many different languages. Already now, the first couple of seasons have been translated into more than 60 languages. The goal of the Come and See Foundation, which was established to facilitate public donations and accelerate the marketing of the series, is to translate the series into over 600 languages. Already the show has some 420 million views worldwide.²

Third, the series is accessible to anyone. Part of what makes the 'success' of *The Chosen* remarkable is that it was initially available for free and only found on the series' own dedicated app. Originally, it was not on major streaming services. The point is that the word got out, people started watching and liking it, and it has only gained in popularity. Since its beginning, the series has now been picked up by and is available on Netflix and Amazon Prime. Whereas before one would have to download the dedicated app to watch the series, now it will appear in feeds on millions of devices in homes through these hugely popular streaming services. Its reach will only broaden by being available on the world's most popular streaming services.

Fourth, what makes *The Chosen* different from many other dramatic productions of the life of Jesus is the fact that it is a television series. The pilot episode was on December 24, 2017, followed by eight episodes

1 <https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/story-about-the-life-of-jesus-largest-ever-crowdfunding-campaign-for-a-tv-show>.

2 <https://religionnews.com/2022/12/09/the-chosen-has-a-new-home-and-funding-model>.

in 2019, nine in 2021, and eight more in 2022-2023. Production continues, with more episodes planned to be released in 2024. The ultimate goal of the producers is to make seven seasons of the show. This means that the show has the very strong potential to draw viewers in, such that one becomes enthralled with the production and spends a great amount of time watching and being influenced by what they see and hear.

All of this leads us to consider the question: Why is this important?

First of all, it is important to understand the strong pull that a show like this may have upon the church's members, especially the youth. From what I have understood from reading about *The Chosen*, the production and acting are top-notch, meaning that the series falls more in line with the mainstream media industry. The temptation for youth to watch low-budget, unappealing, poor productions that are so-called Christian-themed films or shows is low. Media productions are so high-level today, which makes them very entertaining. This was part of what made *The Passion of the Christ* so popular. It was produced by Mel Gibson, had a high-production value, and featured known actors. Now there is available another series about Jesus that falls into that category, which has the potential to draw many in, which it clearly has done so far.

In the second place, it is important to be clear on what we say in response to films and shows that depict

Jesus Christ and biblical narratives. The purpose of this article is not to explain our response in detail. When *The Passion of the Christ* was released, a flurry of responses came out that critiqued the film and the idea of depicting Jesus in film. Many of the arguments would apply to *The Chosen*. One could quickly and easily find resources to guide our understanding.

Last, this subject leads us to think about what it means to share the message of Jesus Christ. And it leads us to think about how God is pleased to work to save His people. I began this article by stating that there is power in media to promote a message. Yes, it is true that there is a certain ability that the media has to get a message out. But in the end, nothing rivals the power of God to save, translating sinners out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. The power of God to do that is not found in film, about Jesus, or anything else. It is found in the preaching of the gospel. This is the Christian's witness: live a life that shines with the light of Christ, expound to others the word of God, pointing them to the truth of Jesus Christ. Bring those in darkness, not to the screen but to the church, where Jesus speaks powerfully to save, for "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). This is true power. This is saving power. This is God's power to save undeserving sinners.



Search the Scriptures

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

Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith (10)

Mystery Babylon's judgment

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2023, p. 272.

Habakkuk 2:5-20 and Revelation 16:17-18:24

Habakkuk 2:5-20 prophesies God's coming judgment on Babylon. Though God Himself would use them to chastise His people, He would nevertheless hold them accountable for what they did to Judah and would punish them in turn. He pronounces His judgment in five woes, doing to them what they had done to Judah and to others.

There is an obvious parallel between Habakkuk 2:5-20 and chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation. Both describe Babylon's judgment, though Babylon in Revelation is

not the old earthly city of Nebuchanezzar, but the spiritual fulfillment of all that city represented. Like Habakkuk's description of Babylon, Babylon in Revelation is accused of pride, drunkenness (think of Belshazzar's last feast, Daniel 5:2-4), fornication, violence, covetousness, and idolatry, but especially of violence against Judah. Also in Revelation the principle reason for Babylon's judgment is: "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth" (18:24).

The parallels, then, are many and notable. Both in

Habakkuk and in Revelation Babylon is a city, wealthy and powerful, though in Revelation the city is also a woman, the great whore (Rev. 17:18), while in Habakkuk Babylon is portrayed as a man and personified in the person of its king or its god, Bel. In both passages the sins of Babylon are the same and are motivated by hatred of God and of His kingdom, resulting in open warfare against Him. The spiritual realities are the same in the Old and New Testaments.

Both Habakkuk and Revelation show Babylon as the teacher of wickedness to many: “all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies” (Rev. 18:3). Babylon in Revelation is “THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5). Both prophecies describe Babylon’s judgment as fitting its crimes against God and man: “Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev. 18:6, 7).

Both in Habakkuk and in Revelation the cup of Babylon’s wickedness, filled with drunkenness and fornication becomes the cup of God’s judgment: “in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double” (Rev. 18:6). Both show Babylon guilty of the blood of God’s people and in Revelation of making war with the Lamb, exactly Babylon’s sin in the destruction of Judah, the temple and the city of Jerusalem. In both books, Babylon is the chief of the nations and Babylon’s punishment is also the punishment of the nations who are left bewailing Babylon’s fate: “And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come” (Rev. 18:9, 10).

Revelation 17 and 18 make it clear, then, that Habakkuk’s words have as much application today as when they were given, for Babylon is still here. Babylon is the ungodly world under the dominion of the prince of this world, a world that hates and persecutes the church; but Babylon is also the false church, really no different spiritually from the ungodly world. Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, and the Jerusalem that crucified our Lord (Rev. 11:8) are all the same place. Always, though that is not explicitly stated in Habakkuk, Babylon is associated

with the beast “that was, and is not, and yet is” (Rev. 17:8) and that ascends out of the bottomless pit, clearly the same beast that John saw in Revelation 13.

That John is taken to the wilderness to see the great whore and the beast she rides is a commentary on the spiritual condition of this world. For all its achievements and wealth, this world is a spiritual desert, as we sing in Psalter #163 (Psalm 63:1),

Apart from Thee I long and thirst,
And nought can satisfy;
I wander in a desert land
Where all the streams are dry.

Both Babylon and the beast are always present until they go into perdition, and the woes pronounced on Nebuchanezzar’s city are still to be completed in the destruction of the kingdoms of this world and their glory. Both passages present Babylon’s judgment as sudden and violent: “Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her” (Rev. 18:8). “And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all” (Rev. 18:21). So it will be.

The details of John’s visions in Revelation 17 and 18 are not all easy to interpret, especially the last part of chapter 17 with its references to heads and horns. Nor is it necessary to be sure of all the details, for the emphasis is on Babylon’s judgment, past and future and on the church’s victory with Christ: “and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Rev. 17:14). Faithful indeed, for both in the Old Testament and in the New, they are the just who live by faith. Babylon appears to be supreme in power, but God is sovereign. All Babylon’s wickedness is under His sovereign direction: “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev. 17:17). God is Lord of lords and King of kings.

We understand the great whore to be the false church, the bride of Antichrist, the antithesis of the true church, the bride of Christ. As a city, she is the antithesis of the city and kingdom of God. Her fornications are her godless and impious worship. The scarlet-colored beast, the waters on which she sits, represents the nations of the world: “The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (Rev. 17:15). That she rides

the scarlet-colored beast shows the close association between the false church and the ungodly nations, as does chapter 18, which makes no distinction between them: the city and the whorish woman are the same.

The seven heads of the beast are “seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space” (Rev. 17:10). Likely the five fallen kings include such as Babel, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece, the great empires of the ancient world represented by their greatest kings, Nimrod, Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Alexander. The kingdom at the time Revelation was written (“one is”) must be Rome and her emperor, Domitian, one of the great persecutors of the New Testament church and the emperor who banished John to Patmos. The kingdom yet to be is more difficult, but may be the Holy Roman Empire, the Romish church, or one of the great kingdoms of modern times, for the eighth is the Antichristian kingdom of the last day, represented by the Man of sin himself (Rev. 17:11).

Babylon is called Mystery Babylon in Revelation 17:5. Babylon is a mystery because it is always part of the history of God’s kingdom, from Babel to Antichrist. Babylon is a mystery also because what may be known of it, though hid from ages and generations, has been made known to God’s people for their comfort and peace. Babylon is Mystery Babylon especially because through all the ages she exists for the sake of the kingdom of God and is so used by Him until it is destroyed in the final conflagration of all things temporal.

The details of Revelation 17 and 18 are not as important as the message of those chapters, and the message is the same as that of Habakkuk 2: first, that Babylon will receive her just recompense from God and the blood of God’s people will be avenged; second, that the just shall live by faith through the evil of times of Babylon’s ascendancy; third, that the kingdom of God is coming, the kingdom in which the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; and fourth, “that the LORD is in His holy temple,” sovereignly enthroned as the Ruler of the nations, the God of His people and the One who makes all things work together for their good.

That the Lord is in His temple as judge of the nations is the theme of Revelation 16:17-21:

And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and

the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

The temple is a major theme in Revelation, though Revelation 21:22 informs us that God Himself in Christ is the temple of the new Jerusalem. It is the place of God’s throne (16:17) and the place from which Babylon’s judgment comes (16:19). It is from the temple that God’s voice is heard (16:17) and in that way Revelation, like Habakkuk, tells us that the Lord is there.

The vision of the great whore and her judgment marks a turning point in the book of Revelation. The description of Babylon’s judgment and fall begins the next section of Revelation. The book has shown us three of the four great enemies of the Lamb, the dragon (chapter 12), the two beasts (chapter 13), and it now shows us the fourth, the great whore, in chapter 17, only to show us in reverse order their judgment, beginning with the judgment of the great whore in chapters 17 and 18, the judgment of the two beasts in chapter 19, and of the dragon in chapter 20.

Along side of the destruction of the Lamb’s enemies, chapters 19-22 of Revelation describe the final victory of those who live by faith, their eternal glory, and the blessedness and splendor of that kingdom in which God dwells with His people, is their light, their temple, and their glory. In that kingdom they no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face and know even as they are known. Then, as Habakkuk prophesies, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

The message, though more explicit in Revelation 17 and 18, is the same as that of Habakkuk 2. It is first the call to recognize Babylon for what she always is, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. It is, then, the call to be separate from Babylon’s wickedness and to live by faith: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4). It is also the comforting truth that God is in His holy temple, that the Lamb is King of kings and Lord of lords, and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful.

Watch, therefore, and cling to the name of Jesus; and have no fellowship with the great sin of Babylon, namely, to be carried by the beast. For then you shall have no fellowship with her judgment. And be comforted with

this thought: the Lord is King of kings and Lord of lords! The Lord is mightier than they all! The victory is assured!¹

“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1969), 577.

omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God” (Rev. 19:6-9).



A word fitly spoken

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Gate

When you hear the word gate, you likely think of chain links or white pickets opening to a little patch of green. When Jesus spoke of gates, it would have been heavy wooden doors ajar beside thick stone walls that entered the minds of His hearers. There were wide gates with broad roads and heavy traffic into the city every morning. There were also narrow gates with paths more difficult to navigate, a fitting illustration of the self-denying way that leads to life for the few who find it (Matt. 7:13, 14).

A gate at its most basic idea is a threshold. It is the line that marks whether you are in or out. That is why in the Bible the gates stand also for everything that is behind them. So, when Nehemiah learns the gates of Jerusalem are still “burned with fire” a full century after the city was destroyed, his tears are not just for wood and stone but for the reproach of the whole city (Neh. 1:3)! And, when the Lord proclaims the “gates of hell” shall not prevail against His church, He is speaking of the demonic hosts that emerge from those gates like smoke from an unholy furnace (Matt. 16:18). Behind the everlasting doors of God’s city, however, the citizens of heaven dwell together under the crown of Christ their King. Thus it is that the Lord declares His love for “the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” (Ps. 87:2).

However, for a gate to serve as a proper threshold, it must have doors. And because the doors on a gate control access, they can be made into a prison. Not that the doors of any gate are able to constrain the God who

breaks the “gates of brass,” and cuts in pieces the bars of iron (Ps. 107:16). Whether He causes an iron gate to open of its own accord to set Peter free (Acts 12:10), or whether He gives super-human strength to rip the gates from the walls and carry them—“bar and all”—miles afield, as He did for Samson (Judg. 16:3), no gates can contain the might of our God.

The doors of gates are more than constraints, however. To enter the gate of another is to take refuge in his city and home. It is to claim the rights and protection of hospitality from your host. There is a sacred obligation to give bed and board to the traveling Levite who is “within thy gates” (Deut. 14:27). There is a divine calling for the godly man to care for his household by executing “the judgment of truth and peace in [his] gates” (Zech. 8:16). There is even the necessity to ensure the law is kept and the sabbath observed, not only by your son, your daughter, and your servants, but also by “the stranger that is within thy gates” (Ex. 20:10). It is a sad commentary on fallen man when these obligations of hospitality are neglected—when a beggar full of sores lies at the gate of the rich man to eat his crumbs (Luke 16:20), or when the afflicted are oppressed in the gate instead of their cause being taken up and they relieved (Prov. 22:22). Yet the gates of the Lord are always open to His people, the sheep of His pasture, who are called to “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise...” (Ps. 100:4)!

Holding such a prominent place in the city, it was only natural for the gates to become a place of public

meeting. It was in the gates that the elders sat (Deut. 16:18), like the officials who sit in a city hall today. That is why it was a cause for deep lament after the captivity that “the elders have ceased from the gate” (Lam. 5:14). That is also why it was a blessed fruit of the virtuous woman’s labor of love that “her husband is known in the gates” (Prov. 31:23).

The gate was a public place because it is where the people were always passing through. That is why the first move of Absalom, when he wanted to foment rebellion against his father, was to plant himself in the gates (II Sam. 15:2). That is why Boaz, when he had important business with another kinsman of Ruth, sat down in the gate and waited for him to pass by (Ruth 4:1). It was to the gate that lawbreakers would be led to hear the verdict of the elders upon their transgressions (Deut. 21:19). It was just outside the gate that the now convicted transgressors would be executed by stoning (Deut. 22:24). You see, it is not only as a marker of location that we read of Jesus suffering “without the gate” (Heb. 13:12). It was also a sign of His condemnation, not only by corrupt elders who “afflict the just” and “turn aside the poor in the gate” (Amos 5:12), but also by God. Unlike Job, who could only stand dumbfounded before God’s majesty in the whirlwind, our Lord could answer the question with a sober-minded “Yes”—“Have the gates of death been opened unto thee?” (Job 38:17).

Yet the gates of death and hell could not hold Him,

and He burst forth with a song in His heart—“The glorious gates of righteousness, throw open unto me; and I will enter them with praise, Oh Lord, my God, to thee!” (Psalter #318). And all heaven erupted in response as the King of glory ascended to His rightful throne in the city of God: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Ps. 24:7). And now, as the Seed of Abraham and the Heir of God, our Lord will “possess the gate of his enemies” and be a blessing to all nations (Gen. 22:17). And He will put an end to all violence in the land of His people, and shall call the walls of His city “Salvation,” and His gates “Praise” (Is. 60:18).

We do well, then, to hear His wisdom when He speaks to us from on high, and to “watch daily at [his] gates” (Prov. 8:34). Indeed, the covenant God calls us to teach this wisdom diligently to our children, to talk of it when we sit in our houses and walk by the way, to “write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut. 6:9). When wisdom cries “in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates” (Prov. 1:21), hear its voice, believe, and do. For “blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev. 22:15).



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan

The *ordo salutis* (3): Calling: Called with an holy calling

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2023, p. 253.

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

II Timothy 1:9

Introduction: What calling is

In the *ordo salutis*, the logical sequence in which the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of salvation decreed by God in election and purchased by Christ on the cross, the second step is *calling*. I define calling thus: “Calling is the address of God’s voice by the Holy Spirit to the

heart of the elect, regenerated sinner to cause him to come to Jesus Christ.” When we think of calling, we should think of God’s voice. Another word for calling is *vocation*, which comes from the Latin *vox* for voice.

When we speak, we use our breath and our words; when God speaks, He uses His breath and His Word. God’s Word is Jesus Christ, for in the beginning God spoke with His voice by His Word. God’s voice is also His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. If you are a believer, you have heard God’s voice and you continue to hear His voice, which calls you. God spoke to you, not audibly, but by His Word and Spirit to your heart,

with His almighty, authoritative, yet sweet and alluring voice. That was His calling of you. When God addresses our hearts, He transforms our wills so that we *desire* to come to Him and so that we *do* come to Him. The Canons express this truth beautifully: “[God] spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends [man’s will]; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign, in which the true and spiritual restoration of our will consist” (Canons of Dordt, III/IV, 16). So God calls, and we come, because He changes us inwardly so that we come in true faith.

A gracious call according to God’s eternal purpose

Paul describes the calling in II Timothy 1:9. In the context the apostle urges Timothy not to be ashamed of “the testimony of the Lord” (that is, of the gospel) or “of me his prisoner” (that is, of the apostle, who, because of his adherence to the gospel, is sitting in prison awaiting martyrdom). Instead, Timothy must be prepared to suffer for the same gospel: “But be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (v. 8). In that connection, the apostle reminds Timothy what God has done for him, so that he might stir up Timothy to gratitude.

The apostle mentions four things: first, He has saved us: God has delivered us from misery, sin, and death; second, He has called us by His powerful voice to conscientious faith; third, He has by the cross of Christ abolished death; and fourth, by the resurrection of Christ He has “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (vv. 9-10). Who would be ashamed of such a Lord or of such a gospel? In that context, Paul reminds Timothy of his calling: “who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling” (II Tim. 1:9). Timothy was not merely called to be a minister of the gospel but also, more fundamentally, he was called to salvation: “who hath saved us and called us.”

The calling is rooted in election. We do not read the word “elect,” “chosen,” or “election” in verse 9, but “purpose,” which is God’s eternal or everlasting purpose. When we decide to do something, that decision occurs in time, usually in reaction to something or someone else. When God decreed to call His people, He made that decision in eternity. God never does things in time that He did not already decree in eternity. God never reacts to what we do and He never changes His purpose in response to the creature. In eternity, God purposed to love His people, to choose them, to regenerate them, and to call them. The apostle writes,

“according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

This calling, rooted in election, is also gracious: “According to his own purpose and grace.” Therefore, the basis of God’s calling of us is not our good works: “not according to our works.” Our good works are those acts of obedience that we perform with respect to the law of God out of faith to God’s glory. God does not call us “according to our works,” in harmony with our works, or on the basis of our works. Indeed, in calling us, our works are disregarded. Rather, God’s calling of us is “according to his own purpose and grace.” God’s grace is His favor toward us. God’s favor is His power to work in us so that we are transformed into new, holy creatures. God’s grace is His power to deliver us from the power of sin and death. God’s grace comes to us “in Christ Jesus.”

Called by the Spirit through the gospel

God calls us through the gospel, for there is where God’s voice addresses us. The question is: whom does God call through the gospel? Does He call only the elect or does He call also the reprobate? The answer to those questions depends on the meaning of the call.

First, there is the *external* call. Jesus contrasts that call with election in Matthew 22:14: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” The Canons refer to that call too: “Many who are called by the gospel do not repent, nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief” (Canons, II, 6).

We should notice important characteristics of the external call of the gospel. The external call is general, for it comes to all who hear the gospel. It comes to every member of the church, young and old; it comes to everyone who hears the preaching on the mission field; it comes in every sermon and in every catechism lesson. If an unbeliever walks into a service and hears a sermon, or if he listens to a sermon online, the call comes to him. It does not come to those who never hear the gospel, but it certainly comes to many more than the elect. This is deliberate: “[The gospel] ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel” (Canons, II, 5).

The external call is serious. In the Parable of the Wedding Supper in Matthew 22 when the king calls men to the wedding supper of his son, he is serious; he expects them to come; he demands that they come; and he punishes those who do not come. When God says in the gospel, “Repent,” He is not suggesting but commanding. When God says in the gospel, “Believe,” He is not suggesting but commanding. “As many as are

called by the gospel are unfeignedly called: for God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him” (Canons, III/IV, 8).

The external call includes two things: the promise and the command. God’s promise is His sure and certain word to give salvation to believers. The Canons express it in these words, “The promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life” (Canons, II, 5) and “God seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him” (Canons, III/IV, 8). The promise is not, “God promises to every one of you that, if you believe, you shall be saved.” That is a general, conditional promise. The objectionable part of that statement is not the “if you believe” part. “If you believe” is perfectly biblical language (see Rom. 10:9). The objectionable part is “God promises to every one of you.” That makes it a universal, conditional promise, a promise to everyone that depends on the response of man for its fulfillment. Such a promise God never makes. Instead, God promises to save all believers, which is the same thing as saying that God promises to save all His elect.

The command of the external call is general. The command is God’s requirement that man responds by repenting and believing. With the promise the command must be preached, which is where hyper-Calvinists stumble. “This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations” (Canons, II, 5). “God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him” (Canons, III/IV, 8).

The external call of the gospel does not save the reprobate; in fact, it was never God’s intention to save such by the preaching of the gospel. That the gospel does not save the reprobate is not God’s fault: the gospel is the beautiful, glorious message of good news concerning Jesus the Son of God made flesh, crucified, and resurrected for poor sinners. If a person sees nothing attractive in that, woe to him, for he despises the glad tidings of salvation in the Son of God. “It is not,” say the Canons, “the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted: the fault lies in themselves” (Canons, III/IV, 9). At the same time, the Canons say, “But that others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is

not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of freewill...but it must be wholly ascribed to God” (Canons, III/IV, 10).

Second, there is the *internal* call: that is the saving call, the effectual call, or the efficacious call. While the external call only strikes the ear, the internal, saving call works in the heart. Everyone who hears the gospel hears the external call, but only the elect hear the internal call. The internal call, which is the voice of Christ by the Holy Spirit, addresses the elect child of God who is already regenerate. Remember the order: regeneration; then, calling. In regeneration God gives life; in calling God addresses the life, so that it comes to conscious expression. Usually, regeneration and calling happen more or less at the same time; logically, regeneration comes first. Lazarus, whom Jesus resurrected, is an illustration of this: first, Jesus made Lazarus alive; second, Jesus addressed Lazarus, “Lazarus, come forth;” third, Lazarus responded to the call and came forth. Similarly, first, God regenerates; second, God calls; third, we come.

Called to come

In the internal call God illuminates our mind, powerfully moves our will, and causes us to come to Jesus the Savior in conscious faith. The Canons describe this beautifully: “[God] confers upon [the elect] faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son” (Canons, III/IV, 10). “God powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God” (Canons, III/IV, 11). “He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Canons, III/IV, 14).

And yet we are not dragged against our will to Jesus Christ, but we come willingly and gladly because of the effectual, powerful, gracious, and even sweet and delightful call of the Spirit in our souls. We hear Jesus say to us, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28), and we come. We hear Jehovah calling, “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Is. 55:1), and we come.

Paul calls the calling “an holy calling” (II Tim. 1:9). Because God is holy and we are sinful, His call must call us out of darkness where we naturally dwell into the light where He is. The holy God calls us to be holy: God will never join us in the darkness; therefore, He brings us with Him into the light, for He is light and in Him is no dark-

ness at all (I John 1:5). What a wonder that God should call us out of the darkness of sin, unbelief, and depravity where we deserved to stay, and into His light, so that we now fellowship with Him in the light!

The New Testament gives an impressive list of blessings and privileges to which we are called. There is space to mention only a few (look them up, study them, and thank God for them): we are called unto liberty (Gal. 5:13); holiness (I Thess. 4:17); peace (Col. 3:15);

God's kingdom and glory (I Thess. 2:12); and eternal life (I Tim. 6:12).

Beloved, believing reader, you have been called. You have heard the almighty voice of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You have come to Him in true faith. Walk worthy of that calling to the glory of Him who called you. When we are called, we are turned, which is conversion, the next step in the *ordo salutis*, to which we turn next time, D.V.



Go ye into all the world

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

The Belgic Confession and missions (4)

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2023, p. 278.

Last time we made a beginning at taking note of how the content of the Belgic Confession shows the missionary character and flavor of this creed. We saw that it is a creed which not only implies the need to do mission work, but which also instructs us concerning the content of missionary preaching. We left off last time with Article 15. We now continue from there.

Article 16: Eternal election

In speaking about election, this article first repeats what was stated in Article 15, namely, that “all the posterity of Adam...[fell] into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents.” It then immediately adds that God in His mercy delivers and preserves some from that perdition, specifically those whom He eternally elected in Jesus Christ. If we understand (correctly) that the “all mankind” who fell into perdition and ruin refers to every human in every age of history and from every nation in the world, then God's election of some of them implies that the elect are found in every age and among all nations.

There are many who criticize Reformed doctrine at this point and attack the truth of election. They argue that the doctrine of election destroys missions. In their minds, this article concerning eternal election (along with other creedal references to election) in no way encourages or promotes mission work, but results instead in the opposite. They claim that if one believes eter-

nal election, then there is no need to preach the gospel throughout the world. If God has already decided who is elect and whom He will save, there is no point in doing missions.

What they forget, or else choose to ignore, is that God is a God who uses means. Yes, it is true that God has eternally elected His church, but God uses means to bring those elect to conscious faith and salvation in Christ.

The question then is this: What are the means that God is pleased to use to save His elect? The answer is supplied elsewhere in the Belgic Confession. Article 22 states that the “Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith.” Article 24 adds that this true faith is “wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost.” The elect are brought to faith and salvation by means of the preaching of the gospel as applied to them by the Holy Spirit. The inference is that if the elect from among all nations are to be saved, the gospel must be preached in all the nations of the world. God's decree of election clearly intimates that the church needs to be engaged in the work of missions.

Another significant implication of the truth of election is that this decree determines the outcome and result of mission work. While this is not specifically mentioned in the Belgic Confession, we do well to note that the salvation of those who hear the preaching of the

gospel on the mission field is not accomplished because of the competence or zeal or persuasive power of the missionary. The outcome is not dependent on men but is determined by God's decree of double predestination (election and reprobation).

This provides encouragement for missionaries. The fruit of their labors is not dependent on them but is realized by God. Even if the positive fruit of mission work is minimal so that most of the hearers reject the preaching of the Word, still God's will is accomplished: the elect are saved and the reprobate are hardened. And although the positive fruit is sometimes small, we despise not the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10).

How different this is from the Arminian approach, which makes man's election and salvation dependent on man (both the preacher, and the hearer). If a missionary's work is governed by Arminian theology, then he will undoubtedly be troubled by the reality that so many to whom he preaches do not believe in and 'accept' Jesus Christ. The result will be that he goes to the grave thinking that it is most likely his fault that these people are now in hell and not in heaven. He will also be burdened by the thought that he is probably to blame for the fact that others whom he knew about but who never heard the preaching have likewise ended up in hell. If only he would have reached out to them and given them the opportunity to 'accept' Christ, perhaps they would have been saved.

What a difference when our mission work is governed by the truth of double predestination. Then the missionary leaves the outcome in the hands of God and is at peace.

What a difference when our mission work is governed by the truth of double predestination. Then the missionary leaves the outcome in the hands of God and is at peace.

Article 17: The recovery of fallen man

The Belgic Confession speaks beautifully here of how God graciously sought out and comforted Adam and Eve after their fall into sin. The way in which God gave them comfort was by speaking the promise that He would "give His Son" to deliver them from the devil and to make them "happy." Jehovah, the God of all comfort, comforted them with the promise of the gospel.

The article does not mean to say, however, that God has comforted only our first parents. When it states that "man" threw himself into temporal and spiritual death, it has in view that "all mankind" fell into sin. When it speaks therefore of God seeking out and comforting Adam (who was one of the elect), the idea is that

God seeks out and comforts all of the elect. This is confirmed by the fact that the immediately preceding article spoke of "Eternal Election." Throughout history God continues to seek out and comfort His people, speaking the same promise and the same gospel.

While it is true that God no longer speaks directly to His people as He did to Adam, He still speaks. He does so through His written and preached Word. Thus, the means He now uses to give us comfort is the preaching of the gospel of Christ accompanied by the Spirit applying it to the hearts of the elect (Article 24). To that end, He calls and sends forth men to proclaim the gospel and commands them to comfort His people (Is. 40:1). He does that not only for the sake of the elect in established churches, but also for His elect who are outside the church. With that in view, He commissions the church to preach the blessed gospel in all the world.

Article 24: Man's sanctification and good works

The confession states here that true faith is wrought in man "by the hearing of the Word of God" and by "the operation of the Holy Ghost." But obviously the "hearing" of the Word cannot take place without the Word being "preached." The preaching is, therefore, on the foreground here.

The Holy Spirit uses the preaching to bring the elect to conscious faith in Christ, as well as to lead them to live sanctified lives characterized by good works. This indicates that preachers are needed. And in light of the truth of God's eternal election (Article 16), not only are preachers needed in established churches, they are also needed on the mission field.

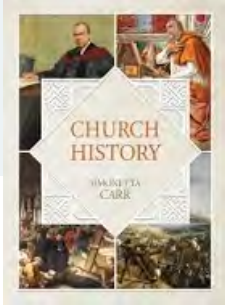
The article also indicates what the fundamental task of a missionary is, namely, to preach the Word of God. Mission work is not (as many claim) the task of helping people overcome poverty or oppression, and/or helping them improve the quality of their lives. The missionary's task is simply to preach the Word.

The preached Word, along with the operation of the Spirit, delivers the elect in all the world from their greatest bondage, "the bondage of sin." And through that faithful preaching the Spirit efficaciously works a holy and fruitful faith in the elect, "which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word."

[To be continued]

Bring the books...

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



The following book is reviewed by Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Church History, by Simonetta Carr. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022. 265 pages. Hardcover. \$35.00.

The days of reading to my children are over. If they were not, I would read them this book, perhaps three to five pages an evening. Let me tell you why.

First, the topic lends itself. The book is a good introduction to church history. It covers nine eras from AD 30 to 2000. It focuses as much as possible on the history of the church all over the world. In Europe and North America, its focus is broader than Reformed and Presbyterian church history. After Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, it mentions no Dutch Reformed person. The point is that the book is broad in its perspective. We need to know church history broadly. Reading it, I benefited from more awareness of the history of the churches in India, Korea, Russia, and Africa in the last two centuries.

Second, the book's intended audience is children pre-teen and older ("Audience: ages 9 and up," iv); indeed, many preteens and teenagers could read it, and their parents too! Everything about the book—its content, style, and presentation—suits the audience. The 250 pages are nicely laid out with graphics, sidebars, and brief paragraphs about significant individuals (missionaries, for example) of that era.

Third, the book teaches. I mean more than that it presents facts. It teaches vocabulary: some terms appear in bold face, and a glossary at the end of the book explains them. It teaches ideas, summarizing the great doctrinal struggles of the church in that era under the heading "Great Questions of the Church," and includ-

ing a yellow box with questions that help the reader evaluate these issues and apply them to our day.

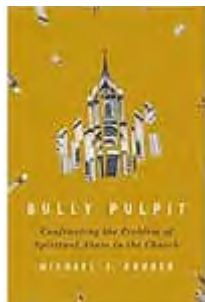
Finally, the book is interesting. Church history is interesting, but is not always taught or written in an interesting way. This book is. It will keep the reader's attention, provided the reader genuinely desires to learn about church history. Those who have read any of Simonetta Carr's books have come to expect nothing less than interesting when it comes from her pen.

An Italian by birth, Mrs. Carr now lives in the United States. She is a member of a United Reformed Church. She is also a writer, which is to say that she is a perpetual student. I was amazed at how succinctly she covered so many issues in church history, and brought them down to the reader's level. I invest many hours preparing to teach church history to seminarians; to be able then to distill all that for young children must take at least double the time.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association is publishing its own church history series, written by Prof. Herman Hanko. Mrs. Carr's book is a nice complement to the RFPA series. For one thing, it is complete in one volume, while Prof. Hanko's four volumes are still being published. For another, Mrs. Carr's is briefer and yet even more comprehensive. Finally, Prof. Hanko's books are written at a high-school level; Mrs. Carr's appeal to an even younger audience.

If I had young children, I would read them this book first, even before they took church history in high school. When we finished this book, I would encourage them to read *Christ and His Church Through the Ages* by Prof. Hanko.

The following book is reviewed by Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois.



Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church by Michael J. Kruger. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2022. 164 pages. Hardcover. \$25.99.

Michael Kruger is the president of and one of the professors at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. He has spent more than twenty years training individuals for leadership positions in the church. In this book he tackles the important issue of spiritual abuse perpetrated by those in positions of leadership in Christian churches.

In the first chapter, Kruger proves from a number of examples the widespread nature of the problem of spiritual abuse. He argues that, while spiritual abuse has always been a problem for the church, there appears to be a rise in its prevalence. He attributes this to the culture of celebrity pastors today, the prioritizing of a man's gifts over his character, consistories and churches failing to hold leaders accountable, a wrong understanding of authority as lording, and a posture of hyper-defensiveness over against criticisms.

Having laid out the problem, Kruger proceeds in the second chapter to identifying spiritual abuse. He offers this definition: "Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals" (24). He identifies some of the characteristics of the spiritual bully: he is hypercritical, is intentionally cruel, uses threats, is thin-skinned and defensive, and is manipulative. At the same time, the author warns against labeling everything one does not like in a leader as abusive, including things like his being unfriendly, having an intimidating personality, not getting along with others all the time, accidentally hurting someone else, and confronting others' sins.

In chapter three, Kruger turns to the Scriptures and explains the nature of spiritual abuse as it is set forth both in the Old and New Testaments, at the same time establishing the proper, biblical view of authority.

In the next chapter, Kruger turns from the abusive leader to an examination of the churches where spiritual bullies thrive. He gives the following reasons why churches are slow to recognize and deal with spiritual abuse: an inadequate accountability structure, a tendency to overlook spiritual abuse in the interests of wanting to believe the best of another, the excusing of the abuse because the leader is a sinner like everyone else and all

sins are equal, and a wrong view of Matthew 18 and reconciliation.

In the fifth chapter, Kruger identifies some of the ways in which abusive leaders protect themselves and retaliate against their victims: they build a coalition of defenders, they claim proper process was not followed, they claim to be the victim of slander, they attack the character of victims, they tout their own character and accomplishments, and they play the sympathy card.

Kruger shows in chapter six the seriousness of spiritual abuse by spelling out the emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual effects of this sin upon the ones sinned against.

In the seventh chapter, Kruger lays out some initial steps that churches can take to prevent abusive individuals from ever gaining a leadership position in the church in the first place, keeping church leaders accountable once they are in positions of leadership, and protecting those who blow the whistle on spiritual abusers.

In an epilogue, Kruger calls church leaders to examine themselves in the interests of guarding against ever becoming spiritual bullies. He warns against ecclesiastical pride, against defensiveness when criticized, against leaders shutting down members from giving help and input, against constant fault-finding of others in the church, against the mentality that prefers giving people a "kick in the pants" rather than a "pat on the back," and against thinking that you know yourself better than you actually do.

This is certainly a book that pastors and elders ought to read carefully—not only for the sake of guarding the church against others who are spiritually abusive, but also in obedience to the biblical command to take heed to themselves (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 4:16).

This is also a book that church members ought to read carefully—not only so that they can identify a spiritual bully when they see one, but also in the interests of guarding our institutions from ever being guilty of cultivating and sheltering spiritual abusers.

Report of Classis East

May 2023 Classis East Report

Classis East convened Wednesday May 10, 2023 at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Rev. McGeown served as chairman. Eight elders served at classis for the first time and signed the Formula of Subscription, a vow to uphold the teaching of Scripture summarized in the Reformed Confessions.

The routine matters treated by classis included approving the work of its Stated Clerk and Classical Committee (this committee does work on behalf of classis when classis is not in session). A schedule for classical appointments for Georgetown, Hudsonville, and Zion PRCs was adopted. The expenses for the meeting of \$3,065 were approved.

Classis appointed two moderators for churches that currently do not have pastors, Rev. M. McGeown for Zion and Prof. R. Dykstra for Georgetown.

One consistory requested the advice of classis regarding a discipline case. The elders representing the consistory summarized the work done with a member walking impenitently in sin. Classis advised the consistory to proceed in its work of discipline and announce the name of the impenitent member to the congregation (Article 77 of the Church Order). This matter was treated in closed session.

Classis treated one appeal of an individual against a consistory regarding a sensitive matter in closed session. Classis upheld the appeal and directed a previously appointed special committee of classis to continue to assist the consistory in working with the individual.

Classis treated seven protests against a decision taken in March not to approve of the overture of Providence PRC, which overture proposes that synod hire an independent third party to investigate the incidents of child sexual abuse in the PRCA. In January of 2023 classis appointed a committee to look further into certain matters and bring a recommendation to classis in March. The committee was divided and presented a majority and minority report. Classis adopted the majority report that recommended that classis not approve the overture. Two of the seven protests contended that classis should have rejected the majority report and declared that it did not fulfill the mandate given to it



by classis in January. Classis did not sustain the protests on this point. Six of the protests argued that the four grounds of the majority report adopted by classis were erroneous. Classis sustained these protests. Classis then approved a recommendation to “inform synod that it erred in adopting the four grounds of the majority report and forward the...decision to Synod 2023.” Classis did not treat requests to approve the overture of Providence PRC since the overture has been submitted for the consideration of synod in June. A motion to acknowledge and apologize for any harm done to victims of abuse and their families caused by the March decision failed.

Trinity PRC will host the next meeting of Classis East on September 13, 2023.

Pastor Clayton Spronk
Stated Clerk, Classis East



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 May 7 Rev. J. Holstege was installed as the eleventh pastor in First PRC's (Grand Rapids, MI) history, with Prof. C. Griess leading the service. In the evening Rev. Holstege preached his inaugural sermon, taking as his text Isaiah 55:10, 11, and expounding it under the theme “God’s Word Prospering Where He Sends It.” After the installation service the congregation enjoyed a fellowship lunch together and a welcome program was held for their new pastor and his family.

At the time of this writing the following may be reported concerning calls to vacant PRCs:

- Rev. J. Mahtani declined the call to Doon (IA) PRC.
- Rev. A. Brummel declined the call to Hudsonville (MI) PRC.
- Rev. M. Kortus was considering the call to Lynden (WA) PRC.
- Hosanna PRC's Consistory announced a new trio: Revs. M. Kortus, J. Mahtani, and C. Spronk. The congregation voted on May 21.

- Randolph PRC's Council formed a new trio of Revs. M. Kortus, J. Maatman, and D. Noorman. The congregation voted May 21.

- Zion PRC's Council formed a trio of Revs. A. Brummel, M. DeBoer, and C. Spronk. The congregation voted on May 21.

The PRC Synod will meet in Southwest PRC (Wyoming, MI) beginning June 13, with the pre-synodical service led by Rev. S. Key (last year's president) planned for the night before in the church at 7 P.M. For a summary of what is on the agenda, read Rev. J. Engelsma's editorial in this issue. And remember to pray for the delegates and advisors in all their deliberations, that they may be led in wisdom by the Head of the church, Jesus Christ.

Seminary news

The PRC Seminary ended its 2022-23 school year on May 19. Senior Matt Koerner will be examined by the PRC Synod beginning on June 13. His graduation is planned for Thursday evening, June 15, in Southwest PRC. May the Lord uphold the brother as he submits to this examination and prepares for his place of service in the churches.

In early May, the faculty of the PRC Seminary announced with joy that it had licensed student Aaron VanDyke (entering his junior year starting this fall) to speak a word of edification in the churches. The professors added that they "are grateful for the brother's progress to this point in his training" and that "all

scheduling of Mr. VanDyke must be done through the seminary, either by sending a request to the seminary secretary (seminarysecretary@prca.org) or the rector, Prof. R. Cammenga (cammenga@prca.org)." The brother led his first service (morning) in First PRC-Holland, MI on May 21.

Sem. Arend Haveman will be doing his senior-year internship this summer and fall (July-December) in Pittsburgh (PA) PRC under Rev. W. Bruinsma. Details for that continue to be worked out but the main plan is always plenty of preaching, teaching, and exposure to all aspects of the ministry.

The Theological School Committee hired Ms. Valerie Kleyn to take over the secretary duties of Mrs. Sharon (Kleyn) Koerner. Valerie began training on May 8 and has now taken over, as Sharon's final day was May 26. We thank the Lord for blessing us with Sharon for 4 and a half years, and now for providing another qualified person to fill this important position at the seminary.

The spring 2023 issue of the *PR Theological Journal* has been published and mailed out. Digital copies have been posted on the journal webpage (prcts.org/journal). The Spring issue features articles on a distinctive feature of PRC teaching on the covenant of grace, on the image of God in man from a conference in Mexico, on R.L. Dabney's "proposals of mercy," and the first part of a history of Classis West of the PRC—and, of course, several significant book reviews. If you want to be added to our mailing list (either print or digital) or wish to pick up a copy, contact the seminary secretary at seminarysecretary@prca.org. Also, see the special ad at the end of this issue!

Congregational news

Byron Center PRC once again held a special community service on Ascension Day (May 18). Flyers were made and distributed throughout their locale, and members were encouraged to invite people to the service. Refreshments were also held after the service.

Calvary PRC is holding her Summer Bible Camp on the evenings of July 10-13. In the notice to the congregation were these words: "Keep those evenings 'open' to 'hike on over' and be reminded of God's steadfast presence with His people using some 'mountainous' stories. We can't wait and hope to see you all there!"

Due to the increased workload of her elders, Crete (IL) PRC's Council recently decided to add two more elders. Unity PRC (Byron Center, MI) is also planning to add an elder this year. And that reminds us that not only are our pastors busy with their labors but our elders are too, in addition to their other life's work. Do we remember to pray for them and encourage them?



Let's commit to being more faithful in doing that.

Heritage PRC is hosting a presentation on family devotions this summer on August 18. "The presentation aims to give principles and practical advice for the very important activity of worship in the home. All from the area PR churches [and I would guess, others too!-CJT] are welcome to attend! Save the date and bring a friend!"

Immanuel PRC invites fellow saints to join them for their church camp this summer. It will be held Monday, August 21 to Thursday, August 24 at Rehoboth Christian Camp, located 15 minutes west of Lacombe on Gull Lake. If you are interested in visiting beautiful Alberta, Canada and are looking for more information, contact Deb Bleyenbergh (debbley4@gmail.com) or Hannah Wierenga (hannahbos@comcast.net).

Even though we do not have a church library feature in this issue, we can report on Loveland PRC's church

library. This announcement was in a recent May bulletin: "At their last meeting, the Council approved moving the church library to the vacant school library room in the basement. Not only is the current library room running short on shelf space, but this will also allow it to be fully dedicated to the use of nursing mothers. We also wanted to encourage the congregation to provide suggestions to the church library committee of book titles to be added to the library and ask if any are willing to provide book donations." Now that is happy news on all fronts!

Wingham PRC (ON, Canada) has added new Bibles to her pews and soon will add new Psalters. What about the old ones? Off to the landfill or the paper gator? No, the congregation is being urged to take them home for personal and/or family use. What wonderful church recycling that is!

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC of Redlands expresses Christian sympathy to Mary Gaastra, Emily Gaastra, Kristina Meelker, Elisabeth Gaastra, and all the family in the passing of **Mary Gail Gaastra**, beloved mother and grandmother. May the Lord give the family peace, knowing that our sister has gone to be with her loving Savior. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Marlin Feenstra, President
Mary Ferguson, Secretary

Wedding anniversary

We rejoiced with **Ivan and Lily Reid**, on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary on May 12, 2023. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for His mercy and goodness shown to us in giving them to our congregation and for their faithfulness throughout the years. May God continue to bless and keep them in the years ahead, according to His will. "Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58).

Their CPRC church family
Ballymena, N. Ireland

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Crete PRC (IL), on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 28, 2023. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Crete PRC's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by August 14, 2023.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

Announcements continued



Several articles in the April 2023 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* are the written version of past speeches. Prof. Huizinga's speech in October, 2022 explained the decision of Synod 2018 regarding the relationship between our obedience and our enjoying covenant fellowship with God. Rev. Marcus and Prof. Cammenga spoke in Mexico during the summer of 2022 on the image of God in mankind.

In a short article, Prof. Engelsma analyzes the Southern Presbyterian Robert Dabney's view of the well-meant offer of the gospel. In a lengthier article, Prof. Kuiper submits the first installment of the history of Classis West as an ecclesiastical body.

The books reviewed in this issue regard modern day Kuyperianism, biblical studies, and the paradoxical life of the paradoxical theologian, Karl Barth.

The PRTJ is free of charge to all who are interested. An electronic version can be downloaded at www.prcts.org/journal. Hard copies can be ordered by calling the seminary office at (616) 531-1490, or emailing the secretary at seminarysecretary@prca.org.

Call to Synod

The PRCA Synod of 2022 appointed Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan the calling church for the 2023 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2023 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 13, 2023 at 8:00 A.M., in SW PRC.

The pre-synodical service will be held on Monday evening, June 12, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. S. Key, president of the 2022 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Dirk Westra, email: dirkwestra89@gmail.com. Phone: 616-307-6096.

Consistory of
SW PRC
Dirk Westra, Clerk

Reminder:

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

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. Carl Haak

- June 4—Husbands, Love Your Wives
Ephesians 5:25-27
- June 11—Husbands, Love with Purpose
Ephesians 5:27
- June 18—The Husband Is the Head of the Wife
Ephesians 5:23
- June 25—To Provide and Protect
Ephesians 5:23