

The Standard Bearer

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PRCA Synod issue
2023 highlights

Pre-synodical sermon:
In the Potter's hands

Synod 2023 approves a third-party investigation
Pictures of Synod 2023

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Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, emeritus minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado. This is the text of the pre-synodical sermon he gave on June 12, 2023 in Southwest PRC.

In the Potter's hands

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

Jeremiah 18:1-6

Jeremiah lived and prophesied around 600 years before Christ's incarnation. Jeremiah's ministry spanned almost 50 years, during that time when the abomination of Israel's apostasy had reached the depths from which there would be no revival as a nation. At the time that Jeremiah was called to the ministry, however, the situation appeared quite promising. He was called during the reign of Josiah, who restored the worship of Jehovah with a completeness that had not been seen before. It appeared that the sick nation was healed!

Yet Jeremiah was given to see that something was seriously lacking among the people of God. Though outwardly there was improvement, inwardly there was no real change. As one who was only serving in the typical office of the theocratic king, Josiah could not do what the true King, Christ, would do in bringing true reformation. That is, Josiah could not write God's laws upon the tables of the heart. When he died, therefore, the repressed apostasy and corruption would only break out anew and with even greater pollution than before.

So God sent Jeremiah to prophesy judgment in Israel and salvation only through that judgment. The Messiah must come! To his calling to proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord," Jeremiah would be faithful, even though his ministry would be one of almost unbearable difficulty. To minister faithfully in Judah, also for the sake of that elect remnant, Jeremiah had to live in the consciousness of God's absolute sovereignty. That would be his strength. That would be his comfort.

And that is the comfort of the people of God in all ages. Christ's church always faces trials and they bring to expression her sad imperfection and sins. We labor also as a synod in the midst of imperfect churches, even as we strive for faithfulness to God's Word and our Reformed confessions. We labor in the knowledge of Christ's perfect work and as those washed with His pre-

cious blood. We must remind ourselves repeatedly that our lives are in the Potter's hands.

The sovereign Potter

God sent Jeremiah on a trip to the potter's house, that he might watch what takes place in the pottery shop. Jeremiah watched as the potter put a lump of clay in the middle of his stone wheel. Then, as he turned the wheel, the potter began to shape the clay with his hands. Very soon that clay had been formed by the hands of the potter into a vessel. But the potter, masterful in his work, spotted a flaw in that clay. It was marred. It did not fit the purpose that he had intended and was not marked by the quality of the other pieces that he had formed. So the potter beat that clay and reshaped it, skillfully forming it into another vessel as seemed good to him as the potter. Jeremiah watched with deep appreciation the skill of the potter and the choice that he made in reshaping that marred lump of clay.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

We find the same figure and question in Romans 9. The potter's wheel and work is a lesson in the absolute sovereignty of God. God condescends to our level and uses this earthly figure to show us the most basic fact of life.

God is the Potter, we are the clay. Everything is in His hands as the Potter. That is the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty. That is the truth that Jeremiah and Israel needed to hear, as do you and I. Many do not want to hear it. When Jeremiah left that potter's house and brought this Word of God to the people, they rejected it. They said, "We will walk after our own devices!" Then they turned to each other and said concerning God's servant Jeremiah, "Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words." Such is the burden God's servants

have to bear sometimes. But Israel's response did not change the truth that Jeremiah preached: God is God.

The picture of God as the Potter is especially appropriate, which is why we find it used not only here but also in Romans 9, as well as in Isaiah 45 where the sovereignty of God is set forth against the brazen opposition of those who so foolishly insist on attempting to kick Him off His throne. In Isaiah 45:9, the inspired prophet says, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?"

How presumptuous for us to assume that God is obligated to do what we want Him to do! How arrogant for us to complain about the work of the Potter! We are but clay! That truth is elementary to the Christian faith. God alone has complete mastery over us. That is true not only in our lives individually, but that is true as churches. God takes that marred clay and pounds it and reshapes it into a work that reflects His own will.

The purposeful work

God's work as the Potter is purposeful. As a master Potter, He accomplishes by His hands that which He has perfectly designed in His own mind. With the slightest adjustment of His thumbs or fingers, as it were, He changes the contours of that object that He has in His mind. John Calvin, in his treatment of this text, pointed out that until we come to grips with that truth in our own lives, until we realize that we are so subject to God's power that our situation can be changed in moment, we will never be as humble as we ought to be. We are always subject to God, always dependent upon Him who alone is the Potter. And shall we not trust Him? His way is perfect.

But that also means that He alone has the right to determine our way. This figure of the potter and the clay is only a figure. It has its limitations. The limitation of this figure is this: The fact that we are denoted as clay does not mean to deny that God deals with us as the rational-moral creatures that we are. He created us this way—responsible creatures. And as such He holds us to account. Such were those whom He addressed by His Word in this figure. We find the same thing in Isaiah 29:13-16. There, nearly 100 years before Jeremiah prophesied, the prophet Isaiah was called by God to bring His Word of judgment to a rebellious people. They would thrust God from His Potter's stool and sit there themselves.

And that is the perversity of our own sinfulness. That is what sin does—it attempts to thrust the sovereign Lord from His throne and to seize authority from Him.

It rejects what He says and makes the determination, "I will do what I determine." So great is that perversion, that the consequence, says Isaiah, is that God removes wisdom from those who walk in such a way. What a horrible judgment! That is why you find those caught in the snares of their own sinful walk, making such horrifying decisions and choices that they simply fall deeper and deeper into their abominations. That is what God does with us, when we attempt to live as though God cannot see us.

To us whom He has chosen to look upon in Christ, and therefore to form as vessels that show forth the beauty which is His grace, we can only stand in deepest humility and awe at what God has made of us. But there are always those who rise up against such a portrayal of God as absolutely sovereign. When Satan has so long attempted to deceive and to teach, "You shall be as God," the sinfulness of the human heart is such that it is given to swell itself in pride and to think that way. It is easy to begin to think of ourselves that way. How many decisions do not we make without God in our thoughts, let alone seeking His will?

But to be told that our heads are far too big, and that we are not so important as we might think, that is not easy to take. The apostle Paul, in facing that natural but very wicked argument against God's sovereignty, says, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" I like the way Calvin put it: "Here Saint Paul sheers off our horns."¹ He says, "You poor wretch, you dare talk back to God? You are less than a clay pot!"

We must humble ourselves. Always we must humble ourselves before God, asking, What wilt Thou have me to do?" We must do that as a synod. The nature of a broader assembly being a deliberative assembly means that we do not always have the answers as individuals. Iron sharpens iron. We have to take into account what our brothers have to say. But ultimately we have to answer to God. How does He direct us in His Word? What are the means that He has appointed to accomplish His purposes in the midst of His church? When we remember what it cost Him in shaping us as His own, how important it is that we remember to live in humility before Him. Remember that as the delegates of synod. Labor in humility, remembering Him before whom and for whom you labor.

But the purpose of this lesson in the pottery shop,

¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Jeremiah*, Blair Reynolds, trans. *Texts and Studies in Religion*, Vol. 46 (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, 1990), 240.

as God tells Jeremiah here, is to demonstrate what that clay is in the hands of an *angry* potter! God gives a message here that not only reveals His sovereignty, but reveals the expression of His sovereignty over against those who forsake Him. Jeremiah, in the face of raging apostasy in Israel, God's church, must warn God's people about the pending wrath of the Potter! He is to call them to repentance. With *urgency* he is to call them to repentance! "Now therefore," the Lord says to Jeremiah in verse 11, "go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." But the response was this: "We will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." They said that, paying no regard to the stark reality that they were but clay in the Potter's hands. Instead, they said, "Let us do away with that miserable prophet!" By their actions they showed that the judgment of God that would come upon them was a righteous judgment.

These verses contain a strong warning for us who represent Christ's bride. Though we confess that God has richly blessed us, we must remember that we are but clay, unworthy of any of those rich blessings. What we have, we have by grace alone. And the purpose for which God has formed us comes with a calling. He has formed us that we might show forth His praise. Or to use the language of Ephesians 1:3, God has chosen us in Christ "that we should be holy and without blame before him." We must remember that—not only as individuals, but also as churches. To wander from God's Word and to defile His holy standards for our lives is to invite the most severe judgments. For Jerusalem, organically considered, it was too late. The execution of God's judgment was very soon to fall. The sudden devastation of Jerusalem would be shocking. But all these things would also serve God's purpose in making His final masterpiece.

The final masterpiece

While in His just judgment He must break that pot which is apostate and impenitent Israel, God still will form out of that marred clay a vessel that is beautiful in His sight. He goes to the work of forming that beautiful object in Christ that He has in His own mind. And in

that work there is another lesson for us in the pottery shop. The potter does not just form a clay pot. Pottery is an *art* form. A potter artistically shapes and designs his work. He will paint and glaze and fire that work until it is exactly what he would have it to be.

But if that work will be useful as well as beautiful, the potter does his work with amazing patience and carefulness. The pot that God Himself forms is a spectacular demonstration of His longsuffering care. Think of what God has made of you. As clay, we are neither useful nor beautiful. In fact, we have shown ourselves very difficult material to work with. Our lives are a pitiful testimony to what blemishes and impurities mar us because of sin. In fact, the Bible tells us—John 3:3, for example—that we have to be created all over again. That is what the Spirit does when He regenerates us. But then He points us to what God has made us in Christ, giving life to that which was dead, and doing so by the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son. God has taken marred clay vessels and formed them to His own praise—at the expense of His own dear Son. But to fit us to that union with Christ, He performs a work, a testament of His own patience and devotion in accomplishing that which He has determined would best glorify Himself as the master Potter. He does whatever it takes to shape us after the image of His own dear Son. Having molded us, He takes the blood of Christ and paints us, and then He applies heat to us until through the fires of trials and tribulation He has purified us. There

is nothing that occurs in your life and mine that does not serve that glorious purpose of God, and that does not show the amazing artistry of the master Potter.

But the masterful work that He does in your life and mine is the work that He also performs in His whole church. He gives to Christ a glorious bride, fit for His Son. He shapes and molds a church for His own glory, even leading that church through many trials, always preserving that clay remnant that He has determined to be for His praise. The Protestant Reformed Churches belong to the manifestation of that glorious bride. With longsuffering carefulness the Potter has been shaping us, taking these marred vessels of our various congregations, turning us on His wheel, correcting, molding, and shaping us to reflect the beauty of what we are in Christ Jesus, as churches being representatives of Christ's bride. Do you trust Him to do that work well?

Amen.

These verses contain a strong warning for us who represent Christ's bride. Though we confess that God has richly blessed us, we must remember that we are but clay, unworthy of any of those rich blessings. What we have, we have by grace alone.



Editorial

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

Synod 2023 approves a third-party investigation

The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) met from June 13-16 and 19, 2023, in the facilities of Southwest PRC (Wyoming, MI). The churches were represented by ten minister delegates and ten elder delegates, who were advised in their work by the five seminary professors and by one foreign delegate from a sister congregation.

While I intend in this editorial to focus on one important issue addressed by the synod, I do not want to leave the impression that this was the only important issue adjudicated by the assembly. Synod made significant decisions regarding the training of men for the gospel ministry. Certainly a highlight of the meeting was the examination of our senior seminarian, Mr. Matthew Koerner, and his being declared eligible for a call to serve as a pastor in our churches. An added reason for thanksgiving is the fact that this is the first candidate we have had for the ministry in our denomination since 2019. Synod also took important decisions regarding our calling to proclaim the gospel through domestic and foreign missions, including decisions to withdraw our missionaries from the Philippines and to close the field. Synod deliberated carefully over an individual's protest of a decision of last year's synod to approve the work of its synodical deputies in concurring with a Classis's deposing of a minister for sins of sexual abuse. Synod upheld the protest and stated that it erred in approving the work of the synodical deputies without reviewing all the necessary grounds and documents. Synod also took this opportunity to pen an open letter to the victims of this minister, expressing grief over their hurt, and sorrow for the neglect of synod in the past of expressing this grief in a public and official way. In response to an overture from a consistory, synod appointed a study committee to produce a brief manual laying out biblical, confessional, and theological principles that inform our understanding of and response to various forms of abuse (sexual, spousal, spiritual, etc.).

While those decisions are all weighty, what I want to focus on here are the decisions taken by synod in response to overtures that requested hiring a third-party organization to investigate cases of sexual abuse. Synod's response to these overtures seems to have garnered the most interest and questions. While I would en-

courage all to read carefully through the full decisions (which can be accessed on the denominational website, prca.org), I want in this article to summarize what synod decided and thus provide increased familiarity with the concept of a third-party investigation.

What did synod decide with respect to the two overtures?

There were two overtures before synod, both of which were asking that synod hire a third-party organization to conduct an investigation into cases of sexual abuse. Synod voted not to approve one of the overtures, on the ground that the "overture considered on its own has insufficient information for synod to make an informed judgment whether or not to approve the request. For an assembly to adjudicate a matter, the assembly must have the facts of the matter before it. While the overture speaks to how a third party would be researched and engaged, the overture says almost nothing about what a third party is or what a third party would do."

Synod did approve the substance of the second overture. In this case, synod had more material to work with regarding what a third party is and what a third party would do, since the overture came with a great deal of additional information from the special committee of Classis East tasked with looking into these matters in more depth.

What is the third-party organization being hired to do?

The third-party organization is being hired to look into cases of *sexual* abuse. Synod acknowledged that there are many other forms of abuse, all of which are harmful and heinous, but decided to narrow the focus of the investigation to sexual abuse.

Synod determined that the scope of the investigation would include "all sexual abuse committed by current or former members, including officebearers, of the PRCA." Rather than limiting the investigation to one particular individual or only to officebearers who have committed sexual abuse, synod decided upon a broad investigation into all cases of sexual abuse.

The investigation is intended not only to help uncover where abuse has been perpetrated, but it is also intended to "uncover general patterns of how consistories

have responded to reports of sexual abuse (for example, whether or not they reported to the civil authorities, whether or not they investigated seriously initial charges of sexual abuse, whether or not they understood the deceptive nature of an abuser).” To alleviate any concerns that this might infringe upon the rule of elders, synod explained this point further: “The third-party investigators, not being experts in church polity, will not delve into the specifics of how the church order was applied in matters of church discipline, but as experts in sexual abuse will assess the level of understanding of sexual abuse in those who conduct church discipline.”

How will the investigation be conducted?

Synod appointed an ad hoc committee of ministers and elders to begin the work by hiring a third-party organization. The ad hoc committee will continue to serve as the contact party between the denomination and the third-party organization throughout the course of the investigation should any questions, concerns, or requests arise during the process.

Once the third-party organization is hired, they will begin their work by gathering information through a survey. The survey will be made available to all members of the denomination, and former members of the PRCA will also be able to fill it out. Participation in the survey is not mandatory but voluntary. Regarding charges of sin made against individuals through the survey, synod decided the following: “Survey participants may choose to remain anonymous, but the survey shall be designed in such a way that no one can make a specific allegation of sin against another specific individual anonymously. For the third party to channel to a consistory an allegation of sin against a specific individual that comes through the survey alone (without a follow up interview), the survey participant must agree to have his/her name disclosed as well.”

The third-party organization will proceed to interviewing those who indicated through the survey a willingness to be interviewed. Again, participation in the interviews will be voluntary; no one who does not wish to speak to the third-party will be forced to do so. While synod decided that the third-party could not channel to consistories anonymous allegations of sin that came through the survey alone, it did decide that the third-party could channel anonymous allegations of sin that came after interviewing a victim: “After conducting an interview, the third-party may channel to a consistory a specific allegation of sin against a specific individual anonymously, and every consistory will then have to judge whether it will receive such an anonymous allegation of sin brought by the third party as a credible victim advocate.”

During the course of investigating, the third-party

organization may request information from relevant parties. Since a third-party organization does not possess subpoena power, it cannot compel a consistory to supply minutes or documents. Recognizing the autonomy of the local congregation, synod did acknowledge that it “cannot compel such compliance in this investigation either.” At the same time, recognizing that this investigation was judged by synod to be for the good of the churches in common and that it has the approval of the broadest assembly of the denomination, synod did urge consistories to comply with the investigation, unless they had “weighty reasons” not to do so.

What will be the nature of the third-party’s report?

Throughout the course of the investigation, the third-party will channel credible allegations of abuse directly to the consistories concerned, provided the victim consents. The third party will also bring to the attention of consistories any credible allegations of failures in responding to sexual abuse.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the third-party organization will issue a final report of its findings to synod (through synod’s ad hoc committee). The final report will consist of a general summary of the surveys and interviews. Where specific cases are used to illustrate patterns and trends, this will not take place without the consent of the abused, and the third-party will use non-identifying language to describe these cases so that it is not possible for any cases to be identified even in our small, interconnected denomination. This report will not contain the names of people or consistories or congregations, with the possible exception of the names of individuals who, because of their “sins and gross offenses” have been rendered “infamous before the world” (Church Order, Art. 80), which names are already public. Under no circumstances will victims be named in the public report. The third-party organization will comply with all legal requirements to prevent libelous accusations against persons or consistories.

When the final report is ready, synod’s ad hoc committee will also bring to synod for approval a recommended response to the findings of the third-party’s report, which would be an opportunity for self-reflection on our part as a denomination. In the interests of transparency, this final report along with synod’s response will be made public to the whole denomination.

How will the churches exercise mutual accountability?

Some might wonder, “If the final report is not going to include identifying language, and all allegations are going to be channeled to the respective consistories, then how can we be sure that consistories are going to

follow up on those allegations?” Recognizing the need for mutual accountability, synod believed this could be accomplished in our Reformed system of church polity through the church visitors of the Classes. According to Article 44 of the Church Order, the task of the church visitors includes, “fraternally admonish[ing] those who have in anything been negligent” and “by their advice and assistance help[ing] direct all things unto the peace, upbuilding, and greatest profit of the churches.” Synod encouraged both Classes to instruct their church visitors that, prior to meeting with each consistory for the annual church visitation, they request a report of all correspondence received from the third party with the names redacted. The church visitors would then discuss this correspondence with the consistory at the annual meeting, document the correspondence, and report their findings in summary form to the classis.

Who will be hired to conduct this investigation?

Synod instructed its ad hoc committee to contract with Guidepost Solutions to do the work of investigation. Guidepost Solutions is a secular organization, but they have experience working with Christian organizations. Guidepost has greater resources and more experience than similar third-party organizations in working with larger entities and in investigations of this magnitude.

If the ad hoc committee is unable to contract with Guidepost Solutions under the stipulations of the investigation as outlined by synod, the committee may then seek to contract with another competent third-party organization under the same stipulations.

The estimated cost of having a third party conduct such an investigation is \$100,000-\$200,000.

Why did synod judge it wise to conduct a denomination-wide investigation into cases of sexual abuse?

Synod’s first ground for approving the overture addresses this question. This ground reads: “It is wise to conduct a *denomination-wide investigation* into the matter of sexual abuse on account of the nature of the sin and its prevalence in our churches.” Synod established this ground on the following six sub-points, provided here in summary form: 1) the uniquely destructive nature of sexual abuse; 2) the case of a former minister who was deposed for sins of sexual abuse; 3) many other cases of sexual abuse brought to light in recent years; 4) the failures of consistories in their responses to cases of sexual abuse; 5) as a means to help consistories in their calling to “...relieve the oppressed...” (Is. 1:17); and 6) as a help to consistories in carrying out their calling to protect the children and future generations of the church.

Why did synod judge it wise to hire a third-party organization to conduct this denomination-wide investigation?

Synod’s second ground for approving the overture reads: “It is wise to engage a *third-party organization* to conduct such a denomination-wide investigation.” But why? According to synod, this is wise for the following six reasons: 1) a third-party investigation would remove barriers that exist for some victims to report their abuse; 2) a third-party investigation would provide increased objectivity; 3) the amount of manpower and expertise required to do an investigation like this is more than a committee of our own can handle; 4) many cases cross lines between churches, classes, and even denominations, a fact which requires extensive investigation on multiple fronts, something virtually impossible for our denomination to conduct on its own; 5) a third-party investigation followed by a public report would shed light on a sin which hides in the darkness and must be dragged into the light; and 6) important biblical principles (such as humility, uncovering the hidden works of darkness, and avoiding “respect of persons”) bear on the hiring of a third-party organization.

How does this decision of synod fit within our Reformed church polity?

Synod’s third ground for approving the overture addresses this question. The third ground reads: “Hiring a third-party organization to conduct a denomination-wide investigation *in the manner outlined above* is consistent with our Reformed system of church government.”

Synod showed that the work of a third-party organization in investigating, bringing credible allegations of sexual abuse to consistories, assessing the response of officebearers to reports of sexual abuse, and providing a final report of its work, all done according to the guidelines spelled out by synod, would not infringe upon the rule of Christ through elders.

Synod also demonstrated that it has the jurisdiction to mandate a denomination-wide investigation. While synod cannot compel local congregations to comply with a third-party investigation, it is in the nature of a federation that synod makes decisions that affect the churches in common. Synod, as a broader assembly, deals with matters that “pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common” (Church Order, Art. 30).

How ought members of the denomination to respond to this decision of synod?

There are two things I believe we ought to keep in mind in our response to this decision.

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Delegates to Synod 2023

Row 4: Prof. B. Huizinga, Prof. C. Griess, Rev. M. Kortus, Peter Smit, Rev. J. Marcus, Keith Bruinsma

Row 3: Rev. N. Decker, Tim Pipe Jr., Randy Dykstra, James Regnerus, Dan VanUffelen, Rev. J. Mahtani

Row 2: Chester Hunter, Rev. R. Barnhill, Prof. R. Cammenga, Prof. D. Kuiper, Prof. B. Gritters, Joel Minderhoud

Row 1: Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. J. Engelsma, Rev. C. Spronk, Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. W. Langerak, Ryan VanOverloop, John VanBaren

Synod 2023

Southwest PRC
Wyoming, Michigan
June 13-19, 2023



Officers of Synod:
First Clerk, Rev. J. Engelsma;
Second Clerk, Rev. C. Spronk; President, Rev. G. Eriks;
Vice-President, Rev. W. Langerak



Pre-synodical sermon
Rev. S. Key



Delegate/Visitor to Synod:
Rev. Marcus Wee,
Dr. Bernhard Klautke



Synodical sermon
II Corinthians 8:9
Seminarian Matthew Koerner

Examination of Seminarian Matthew Koerner



Graduation of Candidate Matthew Koerner



Address by Rev. Richard Smit



Address by Dr. B. Klautke

Break and fellowship time



First, we ought to have realistic expectations of what this investigation can accomplish. Undergoing this investigation will likely not bring to light every case of sexual abuse ever perpetrated in the denomination, nor will the investigation ensure that sexual abuse will never again take place in our midst. Hopefully what this investigation does accomplish is providing us with a greater awareness of sexual abuse and its presence among us and better equip us as churches to address it.

Second, we all ought to labor for peace in the churches over this issue. My sense is that this issue has become very contentious over the last few months, some in favor of the overture hurling accusations at those opposed to it, and those opposed hurling accusations at those in favor. If the overture had failed, those in favor of it would have to be

told quietly to acquiesce to the settled and binding decision of synod. Now that the overture has been approved, those opposed to it must be told quietly to acquiesce to the settled and binding decision of synod. In a matter that the Bible does not directly address (that is, the Bible does not directly address whether it is right or wrong to hire a third-party), we must learn to deal with our differences in a brotherly way, being slow to speak and quick to listen, not judging one another uncharitably, and not allowing the issue to divide us. Remember, and put into practice with respect to this specific issue, the word of God in Philippians 2:3-4: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”



All around us

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan

Further decline: The Roman Catholic Church under Pope Francis

Hindu attack on Christians

The *Wall Street Journal* published an article entitled “In 10 Years, Pope Francis Has Disrupted the Catholic Church.”¹ We take a brief amount of space to note that this title misleads when it refers to the institution that Francis rules as the “Catholic Church.” Francis rules the *Roman* Catholic Church. Francis has no jurisdiction over the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church (to which we belong as Protestants) over which there is one Ruler, Jesus Christ. Duly noted; now we turn to the description of Francis as a *disrupter*.

Francis certainly has instituted changes/disruptions in the Roman Catholic Church. The article explains that he has brought in a “new informality and approachability” in his interaction with people as pope. He has also “thrown into question church teaching on controversial topics from divorce to homosexuality.” During the administration of Francis, “church leaders are openly discussing rethinking teaching against contraception and gay relationships.” In Germany, bishops “voted...to adopt a formal liturgy for the blessing of same-sex relationships.” The article reports that the decision of the German bishops “is part of a larger project in the German church to change teaching

and practice in areas including the ordination of women, priestly celibacy and the role of laypeople in church governance.” Some are disappointed that more changes have not been implemented (the article mentions ordaining married priests and women as deacons), but notes that Francis “didn’t rule out such changes in the future.” The article also credits Francis for removing corruption from the Vatican bank.

The Roman Catholic Church certainly is in need of disruption. And Francis certainly seems to take delight in being thought of a disrupter. But what are we to make of the changes he has implemented?

In giving our evaluation of the changes implemented by Francis, we need to remember that the kind of disruption needed in Rome is a *church reformation*. Disruption is not needed in Rome for the sake of change. Disruption is not needed in Rome to bring the church ‘up to date’ in a modern world. Disruption is not needed to keep young people happy and in the church. No, the kind of disruption that Rome needs is the kind that Luther brought in 1517, when he attempted to lead the church back to Scripture in its doctrine, worship, and life.

In all the changes Francis has made, has he done anything to bring Rome back to the Scriptures as the rule for faith and life? The article does not mention any concern on the part of Francis to use Scripture to disrupt

¹ The article was published March 13, 2023 online and on March 14, 2023 in print. To view the online version see: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-10-years-pope-francis-has-disrupted-the-catholic-church-acd228f1>.

Rome's false teachings of salvation by faith and works, of worshipping Mary, of idolatrously worshipping Christ under the form of bread and wine, and more.

We also see no evidence of any effort by Francis to use Scripture to determine what the church shall teach and believe concerning celibacy, ordination of women, homosexuality, or any other vogue issue the pope is open to "disrupting." His steadfast refusal to bow to Scripture or even to refer to Scripture became evident in an answer he gave concerning homosexuality. The article reports a "famous example" of an "informal comment" of the pope "in response to a question about gay priests: [the pope said] 'Who am I to judge?'" In a show of false humility the pope claims that he is in no position to make a moral judgment regarding homosexuality. The pride of his statement is that, instead of referring to Scripture, he refers to himself. The implication is that if he, as pope, is in no position to make a judgment, no one else is either. He steadfastly refuses to lead himself and the church to Scripture to say, "Christ rules His church through His written word, and we will submit to His authority and judgment."

This pope proudly rules a church that rejects the rule of Christ and His Word, and the reason is that this pope and many others in the church want to approve teachings that are contrary to Scripture. Under Pope Francis the Roman Catholic Church continues in all of its unbiblical teachings and practices of the past, and all of the changes/disruptions are only bringing the church further away from the rule of Christ in the Bible.

We take note of the current decline of the Roman Catholic Church to be reminded of the calling of a Reformed church to keep reforming, and of the warning that a church which is not reforming does not stand still but continues to decline.

Hindu attack on Christians

Where do you live? Some of you, like me (in the United States of America), live in a country that is hostile to Christianity in many ways, but do not experience any violent opposition from the government or the populace. Despite wicked laws and practices sanctioned by the state and embraced by many in the society around us, we enjoy the ability to follow Christ openly in peace that should not be taken for granted. We do not know what it is like to have a pastor we know and love personally put in prison (like the apostle Paul). We do not know what it is like to have someone in our church executed for the faith of Jesus Christ (like Jon Huss). Such persecution can seem to be confined to the history of the church in the past. So we should remind ourselves that such persecution is the lot of Christians even in our own day.

Thus we consider some information from the article,

"Christians Flee Indian Village After Hindu Mob Brutally Attacks Pastor and Church Member":

A house church in India's Chhattisgarh state was reportedly attacked by a mob of 200 radical Hindu nationalists earlier this month, leaving two Christians with serious injuries... the brutal attack started when a radical named Sanjith Ng barged into a worship service taking place in Odagoan village on Jan. 9.... After entering the church, Ng attacked members of the congregation, beating on them, and then dragged Pastor Hemanth Kandapan outside where a mob was waiting. Villagers said the crowd beat Kandapan and another Christian named Sankar Salam so badly that both were hospitalized with severe internal injuries.

During the attack, the mob cursed the Christians and accused them of illegally converting Hindus to Christianity. The pair were told they would be killed if they continued to hold prayer events in the village.

In the aftermath of the attack one woman was reportedly "forced to convert to Hinduism" and "at least five Christian families fled" the village to seek safety elsewhere.

This report reminds us that many Christians, whom we do not know, live in states that either outlaw Christianity or outlaw the spread of Christianity. And these unknown Christians face persecution directly from the government in enforcing these laws or from non-Christian citizens who use these laws as license to do harm to Christians.

Some of us know Christians who live in dangerous conditions. In the Protestant Reformed Churches we have relations with some Christians in India and Myanmar. We are aware that they face the present reality of violence against Christians.

Knowing about Christians in persecution reminds us of the exhortation in Hebrews 13:3: "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." *Them that are in bonds* are sometimes believers literally in prison; but the expression refers more broadly to all those who are suffering persecution for Christ's sake. To remember them means to do what we can for them (Christians visited Paul to comfort him and sent tokens of support and love). Whenever we can tangibly help those who are persecuted, we should do so.

But often the only thing we can do is remember our persecuted brothers and sisters by praying for them. May God deliver our brothers and sisters in Christ (we are bound with them in Christ) from persecution if that is His will, and if not, may He preserve them in their faith and use their testimony for His glory and for a witness that spreads the gospel of hope and peace found in Jesus Christ.

We pray that even those who are inflicting the persecution on Christians may be converted through the testimony given by believers in their suffering. "But I say unto you," Jesus exhorted in Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."



Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

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The consolation of Barnabas

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:27

The experience of feeling spiritually alone is very real. There is the reality of how great your sins are that they can rise up against you and paralyze your soul. On the other hand, there is the suffering and pain of disease, tragedy, and loss that can make you feel shattered into a thousand pieces. Internal struggles and external hardships: both require comfort and consolation.

Each of these experiences can be true for the child of God in spite of the overarching truth that our great High Priest Jesus Christ had so great a compassion for us that He accomplished our salvation. Nonetheless, as the cross is applied to us in time and we live out our salvation day by day, the great Comforter is “touched by the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). That is truly a consolation for us, for to console is to bring comfort at a time of grief, struggle, or suffering. “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (II Cor. 1:6).

These are real emotions, and even great leaders like the apostle Paul felt them.

Often, when one is converted in the powerful manner of having the scales fall from their eyes and being powerfully moved by the Holy Spirit, they are on the mountaintops of faith. But sometimes they are not; for when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, he was immediately rejected. He was a new man in Christ, but those with whom he sought reconciliation were skeptical of his confession. The events of Stephen’s death were still too fresh in their minds (Acts 7:54-60). They were certainly not going to comfort, support, and console Paul in light of the sins of his past, nor were they going to encourage him in the new path he was being called to follow.

But Barnabas was ready to console and encourage, and the Lord used him to walk alongside Paul in those early days after his conversion and beyond. “But Barnabas took him [Paul], and brought him to the apostles,

and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27). He helped Paul tell his story. Even when many did not want to hear it.

This was not a one-time consolation and encouragement. This was who Barnabas was, for the apostles named him such (Acts 4:36). His name was Joses (Joseph), but he was given the surname Barnabas, which means “son of consolation.”

He was originally from the island of Cyprus, the first place where Paul and Barnabas labored on their first missionary journey together (Acts 13:4). He was also a Jewish Levite, and an apostle (14:14), whose very first recorded *act* of compassion was to sell his land, collect the money, and lay it at the apostle’s feet for relief of the poor (4:37). This is contrasted with the false charity of Ananias and his wife, who were struck dead because of their greed (5:1-10).

Therefore, it is immediately evident from Scripture that Barnabas was a selfless man of compassion.

Yet after Paul’s conversion, even the spiritual consolation and support of Barnabas could not bridge the gap between Paul’s recent persecution and the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. So Paul was called to Arabia, where he received revelations from the Lord and began to preach in the surrounding region of Damascus (Acts 9:22; Gal. 1:17-18). After this, he left for his native Tarsus to sharpen his tent-making skills and wait on the Lord for several years (Acts 9:30; 18:3).

In the meantime, Barnabas was proving himself to be a man with spiritual gifts, for he was soon sent by the church at Jerusalem to Antioch: “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23-24).

In this Barnabas demonstrated that his consolation was not merely for his fellow man (Paul) who was experiencing rejection, but for those dead, lost sinners who

need the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the ultimate consolation!

Many of the people Barnabas preached to and ministered to were scattered abroad *because of* the intense persecution of Paul prior to his conversion. But in the Lord's providence, Barnabas *remembered* and *sought out* that same "persecutor-turned-apostle"! After several years apart, Barnabas had the Spirit-worked intuition that there was a man capable for the mission work that was to come.

What Barnabas recognized in Paul is that his experience of conversion could be a powerful testimony to the Gentiles that only the Lord changes the heart. Only God can change a pagan into a saint. In an instant, the persecutor can become the persecuted—a complete spiritual transformation that Paul himself experienced in a visible, unique way.

After Barnabas sought out Paul and brought him to Antioch, a whole year passed as that local church developed and was prepared to be the first "calling church" of any missionary program (Acts 11:26). After that year and after bringing relief to the poor in Jerusalem through Barnabas and Paul, the church at Antioch was led by the Holy Spirit to proclaim, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (11:29-30; 13:2).

In a sense, if not for Barnabas, Paul would not have been the man that he was.¹ And soon into their experiences Barnabas fades into the background, again a testament to his character, recognizing that Christ must increase and he must decrease (John 3:30-31). Barnabas understood that it was not about his own name and recognition, but about what was best for the church and the name of Christ.

The experiences that Paul and Barnabas shared on the mission field on that first journey were diverse: miracles to confirm that the Lord was blessing their work, angry Jews who shadowed them from city to city, and intense physical persecution, even being left for dead (Acts 14).

Through it all, the gospel was powerfully proclaimed and churches were planted. Upon returning, there was joy in Antioch at the success of the missionaries through the work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 14:26-28). But the joy did not last long as they were challenged by Judaizers who wanted circumcision required for new converts (15:1-5). Again, the Holy Spirit defeated the forces of evil as the church in Jerusalem judged to "not trouble the Gentiles" (15:19, 28).

As my last article explained (April 15, 2023), there was contention between Paul and Barnabas at the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:36-41). While Paul and Barnabas were united on the preaching of the gospel to a non-segregated church, they disagreed over the character and reliability of John Mark.

Barnabas may have been a "man of consolation," but he knew when it was time to be uncompromising. Consolation and resoluteness are not dichotomous attributes of a man. And as was proved in the last article, he was right about John Mark.

And in this we see the consolation of Barnabas towards Mark, too. Before there was even a contention with Paul, Barnabas and Paul took Mark with them when they returned from their relief trip in Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 12:25). As the last *SB* article showed, Mark was prepared by the apostle Peter, and Barnabas recognized his gifts right away.

Within that context and through his contention with Paul, Barnabas showed himself to be a man of second chances. If he could see the grace of God in Paul to be a great missionary leader when others were skeptical, he could see something in Mark that would lead *him* to be used for the benefit of the early church—even after he deserted the missionaries on the first journey (Acts 13:13).

In the end Barnabas saw something Paul did not, for Paul, at the end of his life, penned a request for Mark's presence to be a consolation to *him* (II Tim. 4:11). The contention between Barnabas and Paul had clearly been resolved, and the intuition of Barnabas was confirmed. Even prior to this, Paul had written to the Corinthians, defending his and Barnabas' need to work to support themselves as they preached the gospel (I Cor. 9:6). Clearly the two had reconciled.

But Barnabas was a fallible man just like any other leader in the church. When Paul had a dispute with Peter because he left the Gentiles for the approaching Jews during a meal, Barnabas wrongly followed Peter's example. Galatians 2:11-14 records the incident:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that *Barnabas* also was carried away with their dissimulation [hypocrisy]. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

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

From this we see Barnabas was not immune to the pressures of the fear of man. And he, too, was rebuked by Paul for being a hypocrite regarding that important truth that the gospel is color-blind. For being neither Jew nor Gentile is advantageous for being a citizen of the kingdom of God. And Barnabas knew that from his powerful testimony and work with Gentiles on the first missionary journey!

We are also reminded from this passage that our principle and practice must coincide. Paul, Peter, and Barnabas agreed on the principle of salvation by faith alone, but Paul had admonished his colleagues Peter and Barnabas for how they practiced that essential truth.²

Therefore, the Spirit always has a purpose for what is revealed in the Scriptures. Here in the Galatians passage we are shown to be cautious in how lofty we elevate leaders in the church. While they demonstrate great spiritual gifts, possessing a compassion and understanding of others that we even may strongly desire, they remain weak, fallen men. Without the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in them, they are nothing (I Cor. 3:5-7).

But God uses means, and God used Barnabas for the good of the church. And it is clear from the word he preached and his care of others that Barnabas had a deep love for the church.

And Paul would have recognized that love in spite of

their contention. Although the two reconciled, Scripture reveals that at the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem's important decision, when they had their contention, Barnabas had taken his nephew Mark and sailed once again for Cyprus (Acts 15:39; Col. 4:10).

Christian tradition has consistently cited a martyr's death for Barnabas in Salamis, Cyprus in AD 60. This can be supported with Scripture, for Paul's reference to John Mark in his letter to the Colossians (written c. AD 60-62) has no mention of Barnabas, indicating that he may have already died. And so his earthly pilgrimage may have ended where his life and mission work first started.

Barnabas: a life full of selfless acts of consolation, great persecutions endured, and evidence that he was God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

And those "before-ordained" works would follow him. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). They would follow him to his eternal rest where he would obtain the "consolation of Christ," where all comfort, fellowship, and love reside in our innermost being (Phil. 2:1). That everlasting consolation is the only hope that can bring the ultimate comfort to our weary souls (II Thess. 2:16-17).

² J. Gresham Machen. *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 41-42.



Taking heed to the doctrine

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Antinomians? Without a doubt (7)

Although the wicked, while they reproach God and pour and vomit out the venom of their breast, harden themselves in the vain hope that they shall not be punished, still there will not be a syllable which the Lord does not hear and which he does not at length call to account.

John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 3:123

In this series of articles we are examining the false teaching of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) that God's forgiveness of sins takes place before God-worked repentance over sin. On account of their teaching we have charged them with maintaining the dread error of antinomianism, which is indeed true both from an historical viewpoint and a theological viewpoint. This was one of the errors that the English antinomians held prior to the Westminster Assembly.

Until now, we have examined this distinctive doctrine

of the RPC in light of John Calvin's teaching. We have demonstrated that no one can read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* or his commentaries without concluding that he taught that God's forgiveness (pardon) follows God's work of bringing the elect sinner to repentance. God forgives our sins *in the way of* our repentance. And apart from repentance, God does not forgive sin. Calvin knew nothing of an eternal forgiveness before—long before—the sinner's repentance. The promise of the gospel is that God for Christ's sake will forgive the sins of every truly repentant sinner. Every sinner who grieves over his sins, as David does in Psalms 32 and 51, receives from a gracious God the forgiveness of sins.

I want to conclude our examination of Calvin's teaching by calling attention to Calvin's prayers. Calvin's prayers give us a unique glimpse of his theology. Many of Calvin's Old Testament commentaries were not written as biblical commentaries. Instead, they began as Calvin's class lectures to students aspiring to the ministry in the Academy of Geneva. These class lectures were taken down by dictation, edited, and later printed as commentaries. Included in the transcription were also the prayers with which Calvin concluded each of his lectures. Whenever his time was up, he brought his lecture to a close, but before dismissing his students he offered up prayer. Then, at the next class period, he simply picked up his lecture at the point at which he had previously ended. Calvin's prayers offer an easily overlooked witness to his teaching on the relation between repentance and forgiveness.

Lectures on the prophecy of Jeremiah

Calvin's lectures on the prophecy of Jeremiah, translated into English, extend to five volumes. At the conclusion of his lecture on Jeremiah 9:3-9, Calvin prays that we "may not continue obstinate in evil nor pertinaciously [stubbornly] resist thy will, but that we may on the contrary learn to anticipate thy judgment and thus receive thy corrections, so that our sins may be hated by us, and that we may become judges of ourselves, in order that we may obtain pardon, and that having obtained it we may not doubt ever to call on thee as our Father" (1:473). If we are to hate our sins "in order that we may obtain pardon," it is clear that forgiveness of sins follows sorrow over and confession of sin. Further, it is clear that since we "obtain pardon," this benefit of salvation is bestowed upon the child of God during his lifetime.

Calvin's prayer after his lecture on Jeremiah 11:18-23, includes the plea "that we may not sleep in our sins," but rather "humble ourselves before thee, and so

seek thy pardon, that when we may lie down in true repentance, thou mayest absolve us in thy mercy, through the virtue of that sacrifice by which thine only-begotten Son has once for all reconciled us to thee." Calvin's expressions are moving: "that we may not sleep in our sins," that "we may lie down in true repentance," and that "thou mayest absolve us in thy mercy." Absolution and forgiveness are present blessings of God. They are enjoyed by us when we "lie down in true repentance," humbling ourselves before God and pleading His mercy for the sake of God's only-begotten Son.

Having completed his lecture on Jeremiah 14:10-14, Calvin prays that God will deal so kindly with us as daily to show us our sins and "exhort us to repent, and teach us that thou art ready to give us forgiveness." He goes on to plead that "we may not be of a refractory mind," but "learn seasonably to repent, and be touched with the fear of thy judgment, so that we may truly and from the heart seek that reconciliation, which has been procured for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son" (2:227). The child of God must "learn to repent," and in a proper way "be touched with the fear of [God's] judgment." In this way, he will enjoy the reconciliation that "has been procured for us by the blood" of God's Son.

A bit later, after his lecture on Jeremiah 14:21-15:2, Calvin prays: "Grant, Almighty God, that since thou art graciously pleased to exhort us to repent...that we may not obstinately provoke against ourselves thy extreme vengeance, but render ourselves obedient to thee." He goes on to plead that God would "not only hear others praying for us, but that our own prayers may also obtain pardon from thee, especially through the intercession of Christ." Through the preaching of His Word, God exhorts us and moves us to pray for pardon. Through such prayers, God is pleased that we obtain the pardon for which we pray. Clearly, we obtain pardon of our sins after we repent.

Calvin prays, after his lecture on Jeremiah 23:36-24:2, that "we may thus learn humbly to present ourselves to thee for pardon, and with true repentance so implore thy mercy, that we may from the heart desire wholly to submit ourselves to thee." If we present ourselves to God for pardon, it is evident that pardon takes place in time and not in eternity. If with true repentance we are to implore God's mercy in forgiving our sins, it is equally clear that our repentance precedes God's merciful forgiveness.

"[A]nd so humbly solicit pardon, that we may thus shew that we really and habitually repent, so that thy name may in every way be glorified, until we shall come into thy celestial glory, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen." With these words, Calvin concludes his prayer following the lecture to his students on Jeremiah 25:27-31. The child

of God “humbly solicit[s] pardon” of his sins from God, knowing that he has no claim on God’s forgiveness. Such a humble prayer for pardon sincerely made is itself the demonstration “that we really and habitually repent.”

Similarly, after his lecture on Jeremiah 34:1-5, Calvin prays that we may submit to God’s chastisements “and so acknowledge our sins, that we may not at the same time doubt but that thou wilt be merciful to us, and that we may with this confidence ever flee to seek pardon, and that it may avail also to increase our repentance, so that we may strive more and more to put off all the vices of the flesh, and to put on the new man.” The Christian’s confidently “flee[ing] to seek pardon” from God avails “to increase our repentance.” Seeking and enjoying God’s gracious forgiveness is itself an incentive to future repentance and the assurance of future forgiveness.

“Grant, Almighty God,” Calvin prays at the end of his lecture on Jeremiah 36:1-2, “that everyone may so examine his life, that being prostrate under a sense of thy wrath, we may betake ourselves to the only true remedy, even to implore thee, and to seek forgiveness.” Under the heavy hand of God, the believer’s response ought to be conviction of sin and seeking God’s forgiveness. If seeking God’s forgiveness is to be a response to the experience of His heavy hand on us, clearly God’s forgiveness takes place in our lifetime and not eternally.

Lectures on the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel

Calvin was busy lecturing on the prophecy of Ezekiel at the time of his death. His commentary on this Old Testament prophet, therefore, was left unfinished. However, his lectures on the first part of the book have been preserved.

Calvin’s prayer at the end of his lecture on Ezekiel 12:8-16 begins, “Grant, I say, that we may embrace what is proposed to us in thy name with humility and reverence becoming to thy children, so that we may repent of our sins, and obtain their pardon.” Clearly, the order in Calvin’s mind is that we repent of our sins and then obtain their pardon. Genuine repentance is the way in which God is pleased to grant us the pardon of our sins. Repentance over our sins is first, followed by the forgiveness of our sins.

At the close of his lecture on Ezekiel 13:8-9, Calvin prays that “our destined pastors may faithfully call us to repentance,” lest we be left in our sins. At the same time, he prays that when we experience His severe chastisements, “the taste of God’s paternal goodness may never be so lost to us, so that a way may always be open to us to seek reconciliation in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Once again, Calvin teaches that repentance is the way to the enjoyment of our reconciliation with God.

“Grant, also, that we may beg pardon of thee, and resolve upon a true repentance, not with vain and useless fictions, but by true and serious proofs.” With these words, Calvin begins his prayer at the end of his lecture on Daniel 4:25-27. We beg pardon of God while at the same time resolving upon a true repentance. Calvin presupposes, of course, that God does not grant pardon to those whose repentance is disingenuous and hypocritical. When we truly repent, God in His mercy forgives our sins.

After finishing his lecture on Daniel 8:17-23, Calvin prays, “May we learn also to consider our sins as the cause of whatever adversity happens to us; may we consider thee to be not only faithful in all thy promises, but also a Father—propitious to those wretched ones who suppliantly fly to thee for pardon.” To those who suppliantly fly to their heavenly Father for pardon, it is Calvin’s prayer that they may find God to be propitious—ready and willing to forgive their sins.

Having lectured to his students on Daniel 9:4-7, Calvin makes supplication to God, “Grant, Almighty God, as no other way of access to thee is open for us, except through unfeigned humility, that we may often learn to abase ourselves with feelings of true repentance.” He continues: “May we be so reconciled to thee, as not only to be absolved from our sins, but also governed throughout the whole course of our life by the Holy Spirit, until at length we enjoy the victory in every kind of contest, and arrive at that blessed rest which thou has prepared for us by the same Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.” In this prayer, we find the same thought as in previous prayers: in the way of true repentance, we experience that we are absolved from our sins.

Clearly for Calvin, the forgiveness of sins is enjoyed in no other way than the way of true repentance. And since it is the case that only the truly repentant enjoy the forgiveness of their sins, forgiveness follows repentance. Further, if forgiveness follows repentance, it is clearly Calvin’s teaching that forgiveness is a blessing of God bestowed in the lifetime of the child of God. Although its source is in the eternal decree of God, forgiveness takes place in the lifetime of the Christian—throughout the lifetime of the Christian.

Calvin’s prayers brim with his theology. Among other things, his prayers teach us what he held to be the proper relation between repentance and forgiveness. Whatever the skewed theology of the Reformed Protestant Churches may be, it is not the theology of John Calvin. It is instead the dread theology of anti-nomianism. For if forgiveness takes place in eternity, what need is there for repentance in the lifetime of the Christian?



Strength of youth

Rev. Heath Bleyenberg, pastor of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

Spiritual maturity manifest

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

Ephesians 4:15

Are you growing? Are you maturing? Are you developing? Even as a little boy grows and develops into a full grown man, so the Word of God calls us to grow and develop. We are to grow up into Jesus Christ, even “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

This is what we considered last time—the call to spiritual maturity in Jesus Christ and the fervent desire that must be ours all our life long to grow up into Him who is our Head (Dec. 1, 2022, p. 117).

Now we consider the manifestation of this spiritual maturity. What does it look like in our lives as we progress from spiritual infants to mature, spiritual adults?

Marks of spiritual maturity

The context of Ephesians 4 gives us at least two marks of spiritual maturity.

First of all, to grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ means that we will behave ourselves with “all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (v. 2).

Lowliness is essentially humility. This humility is not thinking more highly of myself than I ought to think. Envision in your mind’s eye a young strong man who thinks he can conquer the world and do anything, as opposed to that elderly saint who has a humble and mature view of himself. We are called to exhibit that maturity whereby we humble ourselves before God and know that we are entirely dependent upon Him.

Meekness is that blessing of God whereby we wait patiently upon Him, especially in times of hardship and difficulty. It is the nature of a young child to throw a temper tantrum at the very smallest of matters—when it is time to go to bed, or time to pick up the toys. We do not excuse that behavior in our little children, but we understand it. That little child needs to grow and mature and learn how to handle the difficult situations in life without throwing a fit and becoming discontent.

As we grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must learn the same. Then when trouble and hardship enter our lives, we will not raise our fist and accuse God, “Why this hardship? Why this difficulty? I can’t bear it!” The mark of a spiritually mature Christian is meekness. A meekness that waits patiently upon God.

Longsuffering is that mark of maturity whereby we exhibit a holy constraint toward others. Children (and sadly adults) lack in this area. The nature of a child is to lash out and hit the other child who took the toy away. As a maturing adult, we restrain ourselves from giving that knee-jerk reaction, whether it is an all-out assault with our fists, or an assault with our words. We are called to this spiritually mature behavior of longsuffering, whereby we refrain from seeking vengeance, “for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19).

Closely related to longsuffering is *forbearing one another in love*. To put it very simply, it means “to put up” with one another. However, this is not speaking of the attitude where one crosses his arms and says, “Fine, I’ll put up with that other person.” But this is a forbearing “in love.” Forbearing in love speaks of our patient endurance with that person with whom we do not see things eye to eye on certain issues. The classic New Testament example is Euodias and Synteché in Philippians 4. The apostle Paul exhorts these two women to “be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). For whatever reason they were not of the same mind. The division between these two women became so contentious that the apostle Paul exhorts the minister of the Philippian congregation to “help those women” who had earlier been so helpful to Paul in the cause of the gospel. This was an admonition to Euodias and Synteché to grow up and “forbear one another in love,” and thus to patiently endure with one another. That is the mark of a spiritually maturing Christian—forbearing one another in love.

Ephesians 4:13 gives another mark of spiritual maturity, namely, growing in knowledge of Jesus Christ. “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” A

child lacks knowledge. As parents, we see to it that our children grow in their knowledge. We teach them personally. We send them to the Christian school so that they can grow in knowledge. That growth in knowledge does not come all at once, it takes many years.

So also are we to grow in “the knowledge of the Son of God.” This sounds familiar to us because this is the same admonition given in II Peter 3:18: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Growing in the knowledge of the Son of God means that if someone presses us to say something about Jesus, we will not be at a loss for words. I know that He is the incarnate Son of God (I John 4:2). I know that He is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11). I know and confess Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). It is to confess with the apostle, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (II Tim. 1:12). The mark of a spiritually maturing Christian is that he simply cannot get enough of his Savior! The desire is always there to grow in the knowledge of and love for the Son of God.

Speaking the truth in love

Ephesians 4 gives one more outstanding mark of spiritual maturity. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (v. 15).

There is the closest relation between language and maturity. A little child knows few words. Those few words are very simple and basic. As the child grows, more words are incorporated into his or her vocabulary. Pretty soon that child can communicate in complete sentences. Then through years of instruction that child can communicate his or her needs very clearly, write in complete sentences, and even stand up in front of the class and tell a story in descriptive detail. In high school and later in college that teenager will be able to write a position paper and stand before others to defend that position. But what growth in language! What development! From the babble of a little baby, to the simple conversational abilities of a little child, and finally to the complete language skill set of a fully mature adult!

That relation between language and maturity has spiritual application. As spiritual infants, our vocabulary is very basic and fundamental. I think of the very first question for children entering catechism: “Who is your Creator?” The answer is simple (yet altogether profound): “God.” Then, as we grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ, our spiritual vocabulary becomes very broad and we are able to speak intelligibly using words such

as *regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification*.

Spiritual maturity has to do not only with the amount of words in our spiritual vocabulary, but more especially with the manner in which we employ those words. Ephesians 4:15 sets forth the spiritually mature Christian as one who is “speaking the truth in love.” This is one of the outstanding marks of spiritual maturity—speaking the truth in love.

To be sure, we must speak the truth. Centrally, that means confessing the truth who is Jesus Himself. We must speak and “declare what he hath done for my soul” (Ps. 66:16). Further, we must speak the truth of God’s hatred against sin and the evildoer. We must speak of the certain judgment of God that will be rendered in the day of Jesus Christ. At bottom, then, we must speak all the truth of Scripture without shame or embarrassment, and without hesitation or delay.

But it is not enough simply to speak the truth. Rather, we are called to “speak the truth in love.” Speaking the truth in love means that I will use my words for the edification of the neighbor. It is to heed the exhortation of Colossians 4:6, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Speaking the truth in love means that I am kindly affectioned towards the neighbor, and I desire my words to build them up and be useful for them. Speaking the truth in love does not forbid me from giving a word of strong rebuke and admonishment when necessary. But it does require the manner in which I bring that word. I will bring that word in a meek, lowly, and humble way. My attitude will exude love and patience, not spite or vengeance.

Here we do well to examine the words that we use. Do I show myself to be a spiritually mature Christian by speaking the truth in love? Or am I more like that immature child who screams and shouts and can only hurl out monosyllabic insults?

What about those times when I disagree with someone? There are many times when we encounter disagreement. Sometimes that disagreement is with those in authority—officebearers, teachers, and employers. Sometimes that disagreement is with consistory, classical, and synodical decisions. How do I express my disagreement? The Word of God instructs us “speak the truth in love.”

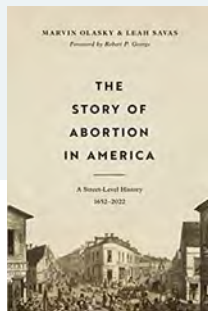
What about when I disagree with that person vehemently? Does my righteous outrage, legitimate as it may be, justify the setting aside of “speaking the truth in love” so that I end up wounding and assaulting the other person with my words?

This applies to the words we use online. When I comment on social media, am I constantly employing

condescending, sarcastic, and biting language? That kind of language has as its purpose to tear down, belittle, denigrate, and destroy. Or am I careful with my words, using them charitably for the good and instruction of the neighbor? To do so is the mark of a spiritually mature child of God.

Are you growing? Are you maturing? Are you developing? There is something wrong with that little infant who does not grow. There is something wrong with that Christian who is not growing and developing spiritually.

The Word of God to us as fathers and mothers, teenagers and children, various members of the congregation, is this—grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ! Walk in all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. Speak the truth in love. And thereby manifest in your life the marks of one who has advanced out of spiritual infancy even “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” that we “may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan, 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.

The Story of Abortion in America: A Street-Level History 1652-2022, by Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. Pp xv + 494. Hardcover. \$39.99.

This book is a history of abortion in America from colonial times to the present. Abortion in America is a grim reality, an infant holocaust, a legal killing of at least half a million unborn persons annually. For it the nation will endure, and is enduring, the just judgment of God. No Christian should be oblivious to, indifferent to, or unmoved regarding this national sin.

As the subtitle indicates, the book is “a street-level history,” in distinction from a “suite-level history.” This means that the authors write the history of abortion, not from the viewpoint of legislatures and law offices, of theories and abstractions, but from the viewpoint of the street (3)...the level at which a woman decides, perhaps under great pressure, whether to abort her baby, and the level on which she enters an abortion clinic or a pregnancy resource center.

As “street-level” history, the book contains many stories about abortions, abortionists, those prosecuted for obtaining or providing abortions, males who often supplied the “need” for an abortion, and more. The males include boyfriends, employers, bums, men in high standing in civil society, and, sadly, ministers. Some chapters focused on specific people and instances, while others traced the development of a pro-abortion mentality or an anti-abortion response.

Written by opponents of abortion, the book was in-

tended to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, in which the Court declared abortion a constitutional right under the fourteenth amendment. Late in the book’s publication process, the Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade*; in the epilogue, Olasky makes final comments about what life might be like after *Roe v. Wade*. Olasky does not expect a Christianized society that loves the unborn and protects their rights, but one in which women will still be pressured by the fathers of their child, or their own families, and society, to abort their baby. And yet, hopefully, it will be a society in which more people openly and vocally oppose abortion because it is murder, the ending of the life of an unborn person.

Marvin Olasky is the editor of *WORLD* magazine, and Leah Savas a regular contributor to that magazine. No doubt their careers in journalism greatly helped them in writing this book; in addition to research in law court records and other documents, they refer to hundreds of newspaper articles. The book is a well researched and gripping account.

The book’s fifty chapters are divided into five sections, each covering an era in American history. Section one spans the years 1652-1842, when abortion was “Unsafe, Illegal, and Rare.” In those years the Bible shaped the American worldview. Because the Bible prohibits murder, abortions were rare. But they were not non-existent. Even then, men impregnated women, usually after convincing the woman that he would marry

her if she became pregnant; even then, men showed themselves to be liars; and even then, men pressured women to abort their baby. This pressure was not due to any thought of the baby as less than a person, or to any idea that abortion was a holy thing. The pressure was due, very simply, to a desire to protect one's own reputation. The methods were crude and not sterile: up to one-third of women died as a direct result of the abortion.

Section two, "Specialization Begins," covers the years 1838-1878. Realizing that providing abortion drugs could become a lucrative business, some used newspaper ads to convince prospective clients that abortion was good, in their best interests, and their husband's (he was "hard-working," and more children would require him to "toil" more, 104). Earlier, unwed women sought abortions; now married women did too. Prostitution only increased the demand further. Abortion was not yet legal, but the lucrative business provided plenty of money to bribe the police and politicians to turn a blind eye.

During these years, one fact was never challenged: no matter at what stage of development, the fetus was not just a piece of tissue; he was a baby; she was a person.

During this era, the fourteenth amendment to the United States Constitution was adopted, prescribing that a person born in the U.S. is a citizen, with all the rights of life and liberty that citizens should have. Iron-ic that the Supreme Court in the 1800s determined that a "person" could include an entire corporation, but in the 1900s that a "person" did not include an unborn child (152).

Section three, "Supply and Demand, 1871-1940," traces advance over the previous period in several ways: more attention is paid to trying to care for the unwed mother, and encouraging her not to abort her baby; women understand that they may bear their child and put it up for adoption if they are unable to care for it; and sterilization techniques are developed, so that fewer women die after having abortions.

The years 1930-1995 are covered in section four, "Seeing Life." One could "see" through ultrasound pictures, which were developed late in this era. But even early in the era, one could "see": realistic sculpted models of fetuses in different stages of development were created. One could see the fetus' distinguishable features—hands, legs, and more. How could that fetus not be a person? Some states began to require abortion providers to show a woman the ultrasound picture of her baby, and ask her if she wanted to proceed with the abortion.

Sections two through four each contain chapters that

relate how abortion proponents developed and refined their arguments for abortion. This fourth section culminates in the adoption of *Roe v. Wade*. Harry Blackmun, influential in drafting the court's opinion, envisioned legalized abortion as being very different from what it became. Blackmun envisioned the woman's personal physician, who knew her particular circumstances, leading her through the decision-making process by having her weigh facts. This would happen in a fully staffed and equipped hospital. He also was clear that the Supreme Court was not giving women "an absolute right to abortion" (308).

The reality became starkly different (306). Women went to an abortion clinic. If the life of the mother was suddenly jeopardized, the clinic had to have an agreement with a local hospital, to which she could be rushed for treatment. The clinic's providers were personally disinterested in their patients, and provided no consultation. That the woman had come to the clinic meant she already knew what she wanted; why talk her out of it? Did she not have a *right* to it? So the clinic treated the women on a "disassembly line" (305ff.), one after another, the faster the better. More abortions meant more money.

The final section, "Still Unsettled," would bring the history to the present, had *Roe v. Wade* not been struck down. Theological justifications for abortion were developed, and manifested humanity's skill at twisting God's Word to teach the very opposite of what God meant it to teach. New arguments to justify abortion (353ff.) included the 2011 edition of the NIV's translation of Numbers 5:27: the man who suspects his wife of infidelity will make her drink a drink, and she will miscarry. (This is not the translation of the 1984 edition of the NIV; the reader is reminded that the NIV is a changing, not a fixed, translation.) Other new arguments for abortion included God's creation of humans in His image, and His love for all: apparently these meant that the woman's choice was always right and pleasing to Him, no matter what.

At the same time, the political tide and the mentality of some in America seemed to be changing—or was it? Perhaps a majority of Americans, including a sizeable segment of Democrats, never *had* supported *Roe v. Wade* (367ff.). At any rate, some abortion opponents began pushing for restrictions on abortions; the outcome was greater than they imagined. In the end, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. One thing remained the same, however: the abortion industry remained an *industry* that was very profitable, even receiving government subsidies, and that *exploited* women rather than truly helping them (395ff.).

A review can only say little. The book says much. Excluding the indices at the end, it has almost 450 pages of text. But it reads quickly and holds your interest.

I recommend the book highly to all who know that abortion is murder. I recommend it for the *mature* reader. Some of the stories, or at least facts related in them, are not pleasant to the stomach, let alone the soul.

Many women's stories are told in the book. Two I will not forget. One is late in the book: a woman, hearing that the Supreme Court had overturned *Roe v. Wade*, was *relieved* to hear that she did not have a legal right to choose, and then *dismayed* to be told she still did (415). The fact is, God created a maternal instinct in a woman such that she *wants* to have and hold her baby.

The other is early in the book. An unwed woman, impregnated by a married cheat, scoundrel, and liar, and then pressured to get an abortion, confessed both her sins. Regarding her dead baby, she said, "It was a great Sin to get it, but a greater to make it away" (23).

I conclude with a word to all fellow believers who read, especially fellow members of the PRC.

Abortion is a centuries-old phenomenon that has been legal in our country for our whole life (for anyone *under* fifty), or most of it (for anyone *over* fifty). Have we become complacent about it? Anyone who reads the book but does not ask this question has not really *read* the book.

Some of us have been tempted to get an abortion, or to pressure a daughter or girlfriend to get one. For some of us, I would imagine, the temptation has led to the sin (I Cor. 10:13). Sin it is—a heinous, intelligent,

deliberate, irreversible sin. The book demonstrates that, regardless of what abortion advocates say, it comes with a high cost: at least one person is murdered (the baby), if not two (when the mother does not survive); the relationship between the child's father and mother is usually adversely affected; and women who have had abortions often experience guilt and remorse (181ff.), as well as mental health issues (379ff.). A woman's "right" to choose and her "liberty" to decide matters pertaining to her own body are costly when she chooses sin.

But it is *not* the *unforgivable* sin. Those who have committed it must confess it to God, and only in that way find forgiveness in Christ's blood. By confessing, repenting, and finding forgiveness in Christ, one will again know God's favor and live in gratitude to God.

Young women and married women, do not let sin lead to more sin!

Young men and married men, love the unborn child!

Young women who are reading this, if you have had an abortion, I pray you will acknowledge your sin to God, and find forgiveness, and healing. Should you come to me for counsel and encouragement, you will find it; I will bring you to the cross of Christ, and pray that the Holy Spirit cleanses you by that same blood that cleansed me!

But should you insist that you exercised your right and liberty, I will remind you that those are the devil's lies. Our true rights and liberties are those that Jesus secured for us. They are expressed in words such as these, spoken to redeemed Israel: "Thou shalt not kill."

And may the men among us be true men, defending the unborn who cannot defend themselves.



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)

At the time of this writing (mid-June) the following may be noted concerning ministerial calls in the PRC:

- Rev. D. Kleyn was considering the call to Hudsonville PRC.
- On June 11 Rev. C. Spronk declined the call to Zion PRC (Jenison, MI) and Rev. D. Noorman the call to Randolph (WI) PRC.

• Rev. M. Kortus was considering calls to Hosanna PRC (Edmonton, AB) and to Loveland (CO) PRC.

• Doon (IA) PRC had a new trio of Revs. H. Bleyenbergh, D. Kleyn, and R. Smit. On June 18 she called Rev. Kleyn.

• Lynden (WA) PRC formed a new trio of Revs. D. Kleyn, J. Mahtani, and R. Smit. On June 18 she called Rev. Mahtani.

And, of course, as you know by now, the PRC has a new

candidate for the ministry of the Word—Matthew Koerner—who sustained his examination at the PRC Synod last month and was declared a candidate. He is eligible for a call after July 15. The Lord has open doors for him to serve in the churches, and we pray that he soon receives a call to one of the vacant congregations.

Seminary news

The PRC Seminary is sponsoring another summer course for the public! All members, men and women, young and old, are welcome to attend or watch online. Prof. B. Gritters will teach regarding the important topic of Christian Discipline. Because all members participate in discipline, the course will be of interest to officebearers as well as non-officebearers. Classes will be held in Hudsonville PRC, Wednesday evenings, from July 12 through August 16, as well as livestreamed through Hudsonville's website. Time will be reserved for questions. For a detailed outline of the subjects to be taught, please see the seminary website (under the June news) or email the seminary secretary (seminarysecretary@prca.org) or Prof. Gritters (gritters@prca.org). Look for more details on church bulletins and on the seminary's website in the weeks ahead.

As noted in the June *SB*, Sem. A. Haveman begins his internship officially on July 1 in Pittsburgh PRC. But according to a recent bulletin, they plan to put him to work before that: "Seminarman Arend Haveman plans to arrive on Saturday, June 24 to begin his internship. He will preach for us on Sundays June 25 and July 2 while Pastor Bruinsma is away on vacation. We welcome him as he takes up his labors among us for the next 6 months." Our prayer is that this experience will further confirm the brother in the call to the ministry and prepare him to serve in the churches.

Congregational news

'Tis the season for...church picnics, one of my favorite times! I can only dream that the RFPA (the *SB*'s publisher) would give me a stipend to travel the country during the summer months and take them all in, handing out awards to the best dinners (fried chicken!), desserts (banana cream pie!), and games (give me that ol' sack race!).

So, with that dream intact, we report that Peace PRC in Dyer, IN picnicked at the PR Christian School on June 17. Hudsonville PRC held hers June 21 at the Hudsonville Fairgrounds. Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD) had hers at Riverdale Park on June 24. First PRC (Holland, MI) held hers on June 28 at Lawrence St. Park in Zeeland. Randolph PRC will have hers on the 4th of July, at noon sharp, in Randolph Park. Don't be late, or you will miss the opening prayer!

Meanwhile, other congregations take advantage of the summer weather for other outdoor activities. Hope PRC in Redlands, CA has a time of outdoor fellowship each Tuesday

night at the church and school (next door) for basketball, pickleball, volleyball, and yard games. Or you may simply take a chair and sit and watch and fellowship with fellow saints. Byron Center PRC has coffee-in-the-park times (Douglas Walker Park) during the summer—near the play areas so the children can keep occupied. She also held a fellowship breakfast at the church on June 24.

First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) is undergoing an approximately three-month construction project on her upper narthex, which involves extending the floor to the outside wall and closing up the open areas as one enters the sanctuary, creating more room for fellowship. That was to begin on June 28.

Georgetown PRC also recently approved a building addition project proposed to her by the Council. This approximately 6,000 sq. foot project involves adding five classrooms, bathrooms, storage for tables and chairs; the hope is to begin the first of August.

Sister-church news

Here's a special event from our fellow saints in Singapore you will not want to miss—and a cause you will want to support. It's coming up in early July, so be prepared to participate! Here's the notice as they advertised it: "Dear friends, we warmly invite you to join us for the *livestream* of our concert, DECLARE YOUR MAKER'S PRAISE. This is a fundraiser for the Covenant Christian Education Society (CCES) of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (Singapore). Date: July 7, 2023 | Time: 10:00-11:45 P.M. (EST) We would be deeply grateful for your support at this livestream concert! Please email David Kregel (dave@kregels.com) if you would like to donate."

Food for thought

"Beloved, negatively speaking, if we be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, we will lose Christ. That's all. We will lose Christ. But the apostle says, that we must not lose Christ but must grow up, grow up into Christ. Without Christ we have nothing. In Christ as the head, the organic of the church, is all our salvation. All that we have or ever shall have in regard to the riches of the blessings of salvation is in Christ. In Christ alone is our righteousness, our knowledge of God, our wisdom, our holiness, our sanctification. In Christ is our eternal life. Christ is the Head, from whom flows the fulness of grace and salvation into all His people. Outside of Him we have nothing. Therefore we must grow into Christ, in order that we may grow out of Christ, and in order that growing into and out of Christ, we may become like Christ, conformable to His image."

Herman Hoeksema, 1950 pre-synodical sermon,
"The Admonition to Be Firm in the Truth"

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Hope PRC of Redlands expresses their Christian sympathy in the death of **Mrs. Mary Gail Gaastra**, to her family, including current and past officebearers: husband Otto Gaastra, children Gary and Mary Gaastra and to grandchildren Casey and Kristina Meelker, Scott and Emily Gaastra, Adrian and Elisabeth Gaastra and many great grandchildren. Our comfort is that we belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Romans 14:8: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Rev. Matt Kortus, President
Peter Smit, Clerk

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

Reminder

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

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 8:00 A.M., in 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

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

Notification of candidacy

All Protestant Reformed congregations are hereby informed that the 2023 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America has declared **Mr. Matthew Koerner** a candidate for the gospel ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Candidate Koerner will be eligible for a call on or after July 15, 2023.

Mr. Koerner's address is:
1904 Prairie Pkwy SW #65
Wyoming, MI 49519
Phone#: 616-729-7413
Email: mkoerner@prca.org
Douglas Mingerink, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Revs. Carl Haak/Wilbur Bruinsma

- July 2—A Wife's Submission to Her Husband
Ephesians 5:22-24
- July 9—A Beautiful Example of Fearless Submission
I Peter 3:5, 6
- July 16—Watching for Christ's Return
I Thessalonians 5:1-6
- July 23—The Beginning of Birth Pangs
Matthew 24:7, 8
- July 30—Nation Against Nation
Matthew 24:6-7