

The Standard Bearer

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Diligently teaching our children

Rev. Stephan Regnerus

A crisis of authority:

A call to servant-leadership

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Thunder

Rev. Justin Smidstra

God's chosen, covenant
people

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The Protestant
Reformed Churches:
Common grace
becomes the issue

Prof. Russell Dykstra



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Meditation

Rev. Stephan Regnerus, pastor of Hull PRC in Hull, Iowa

Diligently teaching our children

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Deuteronomy 6:6, 7

School is starting again! For some, the thought of children returning to school is a welcome thought; for others, especially for students who delighted in the freedoms of summer break, the thought of the classroom brings a measure of disappointment. But regardless of whether one rejoices or is disappointed, the start of the school year provides a good opportunity for us to examine the biblical mandate to teach the children of the church.

The teacher

We begin by considering the idea of the teacher. In Old Testament Israel, who was the teacher? And who is the teacher in the Christian school today? This is a matter that we as parents consider with carefulness. School boards are selective about whom they hire; parents do not want unqualified instructors teaching their children. The text describes for us the teacher.

The teacher was an Israelite who had God's Word in his or her heart. God addressed Israel with the commandment: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently." The Israelites were a special people. Out of all the people on the earth, the Israelites were privileged to have a relationship with Jehovah. They knew God and they loved God. They knew Him through His mighty deeds. They knew Him in Egypt when He preserved them from Pharaoh's oppression and made them a mighty nation. They knew Him when He brought them out of Egypt, when He delivered them through the Red Sea, and when He gave them water from the rock and manna from heaven.

It was to this covenant nation that God commanded: *teach*. They had a corporate responsibility to instruct

the generation following. As it was in Israel, so the calling remains in the covenant church. God calls all confessing members of His church to teach. Some are called to teach in an official capacity: in Sunday school, in the Christian day school, or as ministers or elders in the church. Others teach in an unofficial capacity, in their examples of godliness and humility, while living as servants of the King. Many support teaching by serving on the school board or by giving generously to the cause of Christian education. But no Christian is exempt from the command: *teach*.

The text becomes more specific in describing the teacher. The teacher, according to this text, was the Israelite *parent*. Moses addressed parents with the words "and thou shalt teach...thy children." Parents were to teach the children in the home, when they put the child to bed, and when the child would arise the next morning. So the calling is to this day: the covenant parent is a teacher. Certainly, the parent is not the only teacher the child will have, for the child will have many teachers throughout his life. But you who are the parents are the primary instructors of the child. What a wonderful position God has given to the Christian parent! God chose you—with all of your weaknesses and all of your strengths—and He set you to be the primary earthly teacher of His covenant child.

To you, the parent, is given the duty to teach the commandments of the Lord. You are called to take God's commandments, which He has given to you in love, and pass them to the generation following. What a tremendous responsibility is given you; who is sufficient? And what a glorious task is yours! There is a special work performed in the Christian home and the Christian school. The world scoffs at the labor of the mother in the home and will even try to deter her from being able to teach her children. But it is a work that the Lord blesses. God uses the truth as taught by the parent in powerful ways. He uses it for the good of the child and the parent alike, as they are brought to know their Savior Jesus Christ through the truths of God's Word.

The parent must learn to view himself in this way: "I

am a teacher.” Though the parent may have received no formal training in education, and though the parent might be intimidated at the thought of teaching, yet the reality remains that God has set the parent in this position. Receive this calling of God with the confidence that He who calls will also qualify. You are qualified to teach, for God’s Word has been given you and, by the Spirit of Christ, His Word dwells in your heart.

The duty

The duty that God gave to Israel, and that He gives to the covenant parent today, is *teach*. Teach diligently. Teach in the home. Teach when you are by the way.

The word *teach* is a rich, figurative word. The figure is of a whetstone that would be used to sharpen the edge of a chisel. The woodworker would take the dull chisel, which had become ineffective and even dangerous because of its blunt edge, and he would repeatedly file the leading edge of the chisel against the whetstone, and by that repeated action form a sharp point. The chisel, once razor sharp, would then return to service in the hands of the laborer.

There are several points of comparison between sharpening a chisel and teaching your children. First, just as the dull chisel is ineffective in woodworking, so the child unlearned in the commandments of the Lord will be ineffective. The sense in which the child will be ineffective is this: the unlearned child will not know how to use the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of the Lord. The child who does not know God’s commandments will be ineffectual in fighting against the threefold enemy. The child must be taught how to resist the temptations of the devil, and he is taught by the Word.

Second, the figure of a whetstone teaches us about the method of instruction. Just as the woodworker sharpens the chisel by repetitive motion, going back and forth over the same spot until the desired sharpness is achieved, so the parent teaches the child by repetitive motion, reviewing the same truth repeatedly until the desired comprehension is achieved. At times the work of teaching seems monotonous, tedious, and even ineffective. The parent can become frustrated after reviewing a particular truth many, many times, with a child. The parent might then be tempted to give up or find alternative methods of instruction. But let the parent recall that this method of repetitive instruction is the wisdom of God. Let us not despise the day of small things.

Third, the figure of the sharpening on the whetstone teaches us about the goal of instruction. Just as the objective of chisel sharpening is so that the tool may be useful in service, so the goal of teaching the child is so that he may be useful in service of the Lord. The

objective of parenting is not to raise rich, influential, or respected children; but the goal is to raise a child who lives to the glory of God’s name.

How demanding is this work of “sharpening the chisel”? This is an all-consuming activity. We are called to teach our children everywhere and in every instance. The command of the text is: “And thou shalt talk of [the Lord’s commands] when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” When the Old Testament family was sitting in chairs, perhaps around the table for a meal, then the duty of father and mother was to teach. Adequate time would be given to mealtime so that godly instruction could be given. When they “walked by the way,” the teaching continued. When father took his son out of the camp to retrieve manna, let him teach! When the mother walked with her daughter to get water from the rock, let her teach! And then, “when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Here the text contrasts the evening with morning. The final moments with the child at the close of the day were to be didactic; teach the child to trust the Lord who never slumbers and sleeps. And then, when the sun would rise in the eastern sky, before the parents were caught up in the business of the day, let mom and dad talk to their children of the Lord, whose mercies are new every morning.

In all seasons of life we are to be teachers. When things are going well for us; when God blesses us with health and strength, financial stability, and peace in the home and the church, then let us teach. Speak of Jehovah’s goodness. Instruct about the Lord who gives food to all flesh. Tell of the wonderful deeds that God has done and continues to do for His church. Teach of His redemptive love and the sacrifice of His Son.

But then too, when things are not going well, teach. When health and strength are removed, when there is financial uncertainty, when there is trouble in the home or in the church, teach. When the heavy hand of the Lord is felt upon us, let us teach by our example of patient endurance. It is especially during times of trial that we must be a faithful teacher, for it is at those moments that the senses of the child are heightened and they are especially receptive to instruction from mother and father. Children will recall into adulthood how mom and dad responded to difficulties in life. Teach of God’s providence, which permits nothing to happen by chance or accident. Teach to walk by faith and not by sight. Teach that we are pilgrims and strangers who seek a heavenly home. Teach of Jesus, who sits at God’s right hand, and who directs all things for the salvation of His people.



Editorial

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

A crisis of authority: A call to servant-leadership

In this brief series on church authority, I began by pointing out two dangers that threaten the church: the danger of members rejecting the authority of officebearers, and the danger of officebearers abusing their authority over the members. In the last editorial, I made a beginning in laying out positively the basics regarding God's instituting of authority in the church.

In this article I want to address the responsibility that God has given to officebearers in the church. Many pages could be written setting forth what the Word of God has to say about the calling of officebearers, so I will not attempt in this article to be comprehensive. Instead, I focus on one aspect of their authority: their calling to exercise authority as servants.

A significant word from Jesus to leaders in the church

I do so by examining what Jesus says in Matthew 20:25-28:

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Jesus spoke these words toward the very end of His earthly ministry, as He was making His way to Jerusalem to be crucified. As He was doing so, He was approached by His close disciples, James and John, and their mother. According to most Bible scholars, their mother was Salome, the sister of Jesus' mother Mary, which would mean that she was Jesus' aunt and James and John were His cousins. Mother and sons ask that James and John would have the privilege of sitting at Jesus' right hand and left hand in His kingdom (vv. 20-21). They wanted a place of preeminence and greatness.

This angered the other ten disciples when they found out (v. 24). They were upset because they were really no different and wanted the preeminence for themselves. This was a frequent topic of conversation among the

disciples; they were constantly fighting about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom.

Jesus takes this opportunity once again to give instruction to the disciples about what constitutes true greatness in the kingdom: humble service to others. And He gives Himself as the model: He came to earth not to be ministered unto but to minister. This word of Jesus has special application for officebearers, since Jesus is addressing the disciples as leaders of the church.

The danger addressed by Jesus

Jesus is warning His disciples against a great danger that threatens life in the kingdom and church of God. That danger is adopting the world's view of headship and authority. Jesus states the unbelieving world's view of authority in verse 25: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them."

The world's view of leadership and authority is one of *pride*. The passage speaks of wanting to be "great" and wanting to be "chief/first." One in authority thinks that he is so much better and more important than others. He has an unholy ambition for honor and glory. He wants to stand in the spotlight and have all eyes on him. From that lofty perch he is above criticism.

The world's view of leadership and authority is also one of *domination*. That is not so evident from our translation, but is the sense conveyed in the words "exercise dominion over" and "exercise authority upon." The first word means to be the lord over another, to bring another under our power, to subdue, subjugate, control. Both words carry the idea of putting others under yourself. The words, therefore, are not expressing the legitimate exercise of authority, but convey crushing domination. The men of the world spend their energy to get to the top, and then once on top they make others feel the weight of their oppressive authority.

Closely related is the fact that the world's view of leadership and authority is one of *self-seeking*. Rather than being a "minister" and "servant" to others, as Jesus says, they want to be waited on and served by their inferiors. They view others as their slaves. They insist upon getting

their way. They want their own needs met and their desires fulfilled. They use others as pawns to advance their own agenda and to build their own kingdom.

Jesus warns His disciples of adopting this mentality in verse 26: “But it shall not be so among you....”

This was a much-needed warning and rebuke for the disciples, as the context indicates that they were tempted to adopt this mentality as leaders in the spiritual kingdom of God. James and John sought for themselves the two highest positions in the kingdom, and the other ten disciples showed by their jealousy that they wanted the same thing for themselves. Jesus makes clear that this is not the way of life in the kingdom of heaven. Life in the kingdom of heaven is to be antithetically different from the way of life in the kingdom of men on earth.

This is a danger for officebearers in the church. One of the words used in verse 25 is also used in I Peter 5:3 which warns elders: “Neither as being *lords over* God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” There is a danger that pastors or elders or deacons become proud, that they view themselves as being above criticism. There is a danger that they use their office to seek self and use people to serve their own agenda and glory. There is a danger that they use their office to dominate and oppress God’s people, so that their attitude is not only “me *before* you” but “me *over* you.”

Jesus’ word must be heard in all its forcefulness: It shall not be so among you!

The proper view of authority set forth by Jesus

While calling His disciples to put off proud self-seeking, Jesus also called them positively to put on humble service. He said in verses 26-27: “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”

What underlies this is *true humility*. Humility is the attitude of lowliness that arises when officebearers recognize two things: how great God is, and how insignificant and unworthy we are. When we know that, we will be humble before others. In humility we do not put ourselves before others or over them, but we put ourselves down and put others beside us, before us, and above us. Rather than seeking to be great, we know ourselves to be small; rather than seeking to be first, we know ourselves to be last.

True humility is expressed in a willingness to be a minister and servant/slave. This service means that officebearers know the needs of God’s people. We cannot serve others effectively if we do not know what their needs are. We might have good intentions of helping someone but, if we do not know their needs, then we run the risk of doing more hurt than help. This means

that we need to know one another and learn what is going on in their lives. And as we learn the needs of others in the church, we are called to try and meet those needs to the best of our ability. Our concern is not about others serving us or about getting something in return, but our concern is about others.

Such service requires of officebearers a willingness to sacrifice. We do not serve others only when it is easy and when it does not require much of us. But we serve others especially when it hurts to do so. We must be ready to give up all for the sake of our fellow saints, even if that would include our fortunes and our lives. We must be ready to be inconvenienced, to be called away from doing what we want, to help others in their need. We must be ready to sacrifice our best time and energy. We must be ready to get down next to another person in the dirtiness and messiness of his/her life.

And we are ready to do that for the person who is unworthy and not so loveable. We are called to serve other sinners who might annoy us, get on our nerves, be different from us, hurt our feelings, take advantage of our help, and be ungrateful.

In addressing the disciples here as leaders in the church, Jesus was teaching officebearers about servant-leadership, using authority to bless and prosper others. This is a word that must be taken to heart by pastors, elders, and deacons in their God-given authority in the church. You and I are called not to self-seeking, oppressive rule but to humble service to God’s people.

Many other passages give similar instruction to officebearers. For instance, the inspired apostle says in his list of the essential, non-negotiable qualifications for elders that an elder may not be a “striker” or a “brawler” or “self-willed” or “soon angry,” but must be “patient/gentle” (cf. I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). Regarding pastors, Paul says, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men...patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves...” (II Tim. 2:24-25).

May God spare us from proud, selfish, domineering officebearers! And may He provide us with humble, selfless, servant-hearted men!

Some might claim that the idea of servant-leadership is deplorable weakness, but Jesus says that such service is true greatness in the kingdom. We are tempted to think like the world that greatness means trying to get on top and putting down those who are under us, using others for our own advantage and gain. But that is not the measure of greatness in the kingdom of Christ. In another seeming paradox of Christ’s kingdom, true greatness is found when we are not looking for it or even thinking about it but are instead thinking only of humble service to others.

The model provided by Jesus

Why is this greatness? Because it honors the One who is greatest in the kingdom. In this kingdom, the greatest is Jesus Christ. And the greatest came not to be ministered unto, but to minister to us.

Jesus' instruction to the disciples is grounded in His own example, which is why verse 28 begins "even as." The verse goes on to say that He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." As our minister, Christ knows our specific needs, and He came into this world to meet those specific needs. He ministers to us and provides for our needs both in body and in soul.

The most powerful expression of His coming to serve is in His giving of Himself to the death of the cross. Verse 28 explains His ministering by adding, "to give his life a ransom for many." True service to others is always shown in giving rather than taking. Christ served His people by giving up what is most precious, His own life for us.

It is important that we take note of the character of

those whom He came to serve. He did not come to serve those who are lovable and deserving of His service. He came to serve those who are stubborn, rebellious, undeserving, unfaithful, selfish, proud, glory-thieving sinners. He came to serve such unlovable sinners like you and me.

There is an inseparable relation between Christ's service and the service of officebearers. Christ's service to us is the model we are to follow in serving others. As Christ humbled Himself, so must we. As Christ loved the unlovable, so must we. As Christ served the needs of others, so must we. As Christ gave Himself, so must we.

But not only is Christ's service the model, it is also the motivation. Our motivation for doing so is in what Christ has done for us. How often we need reminding of Christ's humble serving of us! And the more we meditate upon Christ's service to us, the more zealous we are to imitate that in our service to others! Christ ministered to you; now go, and be a humble servant to others!



All around us

Rev. David Noorman, pastor of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

Catching up with AI and ChatGPT

In case you missed it, Rev. Dan Holstege broached the subject of artificial intelligence (AI) and ChatGPT for readers of the *Standard Bearer* in the August 2023 issue.¹ He pointed out that some AI experts are concerned about the rapid development of AI and its impact on society, and that those experts have called for a pause on the training of AI systems. He also gave some important cautions for Christians as they evaluate and consider making use of AI in their everyday life.

In this article, I will give some further introduction to AI and ChatGPT, and add to his commentary on it.

Some of us might be happy to let technological developments leave us in the dust, content to remain in the stone age of the basic search engine. In all likelihood, future generations will not have the luxury of that option. AI is here to stay and our children are going to need to learn how to use it wisely. So, it is time to become acquainted with AI and ChatGPT. If not for ourselves, then for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

Getting to know ChatGPT

Among the many AI tools available, ChatGPT stands out because it gave free public access to AI technology and because its unprecedented popularity brought AI into the public consciousness like never before. In January 2023, ChatGPT had an estimated 100 million active users only two months after it launched.²

The main webpage for ChatGPT includes this simple introduction: "We've trained a model called ChatGPT which interacts in a conversational way. The dialogue format makes it possible for ChatGPT to answer follow-up questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests."³

Sounds interesting, but it still leaves many of us wondering: *What is it?*

ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence chatbot, which means it is a computer program that has been trained upon a massive body of information and simulates a hu-

1 Rev. Daniel Holstege, "Hit the pause on artificial intelligence!" (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 99, No. 19), 439-440.

2 <https://www.reuters.com/technology/chatgpt-sets-record-fastest-growing-user-base-analyst-note-2023-02-01>.

3 <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt>.

man in its interactions. Practically, one uses ChatGPT by “conversing” with it. You ask a question or make a request, and the chatbot answers the question or performs the requested action. Then, you can respond to the chatbot’s answer: asking for clarification, seeking more or less detail, or refining your question. ChatGPT will consider your follow-up requests and respond accordingly.

ChatGPT is capable of far more than a basic Internet search engine. A search engine, like Google, provides users with pertinent websites related to a searched topic. ChatGPT is trained to receive and respond to prompts using human-like language, and thus it is capable of understanding complex requests, producing coherent articles, summarizing vast amounts of information, translating text into different languages, and doing all of this (and more) with astounding speed.

People are using ChatGPT and similar tools to formulate emails and advertising, to make meal plans and vacation itineraries, or to outline, edit, translate and even write articles. Similar AI tools are able to simulate the creative process in other ways by producing photos, videos, art, and music. The possible applications of AI are endless, and that explains both the value and the concern with ChatGPT and similar technology.

AI’s place in education

Some of the most obvious concerns with tools as powerful as ChatGPT have come to light in the realm of education.

For instance, ChatGPT is capable of passing standardized tests and producing essays with a simple prompt. Out of the fear that ChatGPT would commence a plague of cheating and plagiarism, schools from New York City to Los Angeles initially banned ChatGPT. Before long, the consensus had changed and bans were lifted. Now, students not only may use it but in some cases students are assigned and encouraged to use it with the appropriate cautions.

I talked to two Christian educators to learn how they are navigating the place of ChatGPT in our good Christian schools.⁴ Overall, these educators were cautiously optimistic. They understand the dangers and temptations associated with AI and ChatGPT, but they are intrigued by the potential value of AI tools for both teachers and students. They see AI as a tool that has the potential to help teachers teach and students learn more effectively and efficiently.

⁴ For the purpose of giving these two educators and their schools the time and freedom to continue developing their own evaluation and approach, I have summarized their thoughts anonymously. I am grateful to each of them for their willingness to share their thoughts with me.

Perhaps more than anything else, these educators are taking a realistic approach. They recognize that AI is going to be a part of the students’ lives after graduation, so it is only fitting that the students’ education should prepare them for it. Our children need biblical instruction regarding the potential use and abuse of AI, and they need thoughtful encouragement and caution for the wise and ethical use of these tools.

It was encouraging to me that these teachers in our schools are ahead of the curve, doing the necessary work to apply biblical principles to this new frontier, equipping students to use these tools properly and preparing safeguards to prevent their misuse.

Considering the cost

One popular fear with regard to AI is the sentiment that if we are not careful, AI technology will run away without us. Or, that machine learning and performance will become so advanced that human life and thought will be overtaken by it. Another presentation of this concern focuses more on the effect of AI on the human user’s mind.

AI can produce. AI can compose. AI can write. AI can summarize. AI can design. AI can plan. AI can troubleshoot. If AI can do all these things well, then why should not we embrace AI and use it as much as possible?

For one thing, there is a cost that could be easily overlooked.

The individual who sits at a desk day after day might overlook the toll that takes on his body and physical health. Children and young people who unwittingly spend their days on phones, iPads, and video games might overlook that these habits are a hindrance to the development of their minds. Similarly, there will be a cost for one who immoderately relies on AI to do the work of researching, reasoning, comparing, contrasting, communicating, and clarifying. Such a person may discover that his mind suffers for lack of mental strain. Over time, one might even regress in the skills he once had to read, research, reason, or write.

I highly recommend an article in the April 2023 issue of *Christian Renewal* by Dave Sikkema, “Artificial Intelligence: Disrupting the Research Process.” Sikkema recounts the process of research and writing in 1859 for 22-year-old graduate student, Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper entered an essay contest and his research process was an extensive and impactful experience. Sikkema uses the example of Kuyper’s research process to illustrate the formative effect of the traditional research and writing process. Because AI has the power to transform that process, Sikkema also reflects on what is real-

ly gained and lost by the embrace of AI.⁵

There is no question that ChatGPT can save time, energy, and in certain circumstances might even help us do better work, more efficiently, and with fewer mistakes. But what, and how much, do we forfeit when we forego some of the rigors of work? What formative experiences do we lose? To what degree will this affect developing minds of children, teenagers, and the rest of us?

Conclusion

There is no question that AI has astounding power and potential.

It has potential for evil through the instigation of the devil and in the hands of wicked men. For example, a recent email newsletter from *Protect Young Eyes* included a brief, “absolutely terrifying” note about the first instances of AI-Generated abuse content. We need to be aware of the dangers and temptations associated with AI. In light of our depravity, we also need to be realistic about our ability to resist these temptations our-

selves, using these tools prayerfully with the appropriate safeguards and accountability.

At the same time, AI is not an evil tool in itself. In the hands of Christians it can be used for good. The question is how, and in what way? How does a sober-minded believer use this powerful new technology to the glory of God? Can it be used to help us in the promotion of the gospel? Can it be used to help us be better neighbors? Can it be used for the development of young minds (rather than regression)? Can it assist us as we seek to grow in an understanding of God’s Word? Only with an understanding of these tools will we be able to answer these questions, and prepare ourselves and the next generation to use them wisely.

AI will look very different in 10 or 20 years, but one way or another it is going to be a part of our lives. Even if the experts hit the pause on developing new AI technology for a time, we need to catch up and educate ourselves on the potential uses and abuses of this new technological development. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

⁵ Dave Sikkema, “Artificial Intelligence: Disrupting the Research Process,” *Christian Renewal* (April 22, 2023), 16-19.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First PRC in Holland, Michigan

Thunder

When the dark storm clouds roll in, the lightning flickers, and the thunder rumbles, it is a sound like no other. Thunder evokes awe and fear. Rightly so, for every thunder clap resounds with raw, untamed power, reminding man how small and powerless he is and how mighty God is. Unlike our everyday speech, the Bible never says *it* thunders, but that *God* thunders. “The God of glory thundereth” (Ps. 29:3). “The Lord also thundered in the heavens” (Ps. 18:13). Thunder is no natural phenomenon occurring by itself; thunder is God’s creature that does His bidding. God has decreed the lighting’s arc and the thunder’s rumble (Job 28:26). God rules the lighting and the thunder and sends them forth at His command (Job 38:25, 35).

In the thunder, God speaks. Thunder is the voice of God, one of the majestic utterances of His general revelation (Ps. 19:2). The psalmist exclaims “the heavens de-

clare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). How loudly the thunder declares His glory! Every thunderstorm is a booming anthem of creation’s praise to God. When you hear the “voice of thunder in the heavens” and see the “lightnings lighten the world” (Ps. 77:18), it is “the Highest” who gives “His voice” (Ps. 18:13). As Elihu proclaimed: “God thundereth marvelously with His voice,” and the Lord “thundereth with the voice of his excellency.” Indeed, we must agree: “great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend” (Job 37:4-5). In the thunder God shows us something of His great power and incomprehensible majesty. “But the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14). The deep waters “hasted away” when they heard “the voice of thy thunder,” the voice of the God who made them (Ps. 104:7).

The thunder speaks of the holiness of God. When God came down on Mount Sinai to speak with Israel,

“there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount,” such that “all the people that was in the camp trembled” (Ex. 19:16). God is the holy Judge. Thunder pictures His judgment. From God’s throne “proceeded lightnings and thunders and voices” (Rev. 4:5). Every rumble of thunder presages the coming Day of the Lord. In thunder, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18). Upon Egypt “the Lord sent thunder and hail” (Ex. 9:23). The adversaries of the Lord shall perish, for “out of heaven shall He thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth” (I Sam. 2:10). When the Philistines attacked Israel at Mizpeh, Samuel offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and “the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them” (I Sam. 7:10). Let no man think he may sin with impunity, for God declares: “Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder” (Is. 29:6). On the great and terrible day of the Lord, when the vials of God’s wrath are poured out, there shall be “voices, and thunders, and lightnings” (Rev. 16:18). But the church will rejoice, for in the day of trouble, God shall deliver them; indeed, “in the secret place of thunder,” He shall answer their cries (Ps. 81:7).

Therefore, Christian reader, when the thunder rumbles on a stormy day, take a moment, pause, listen with the ears of faith, and ponder what you hear: *the God of glory thundereth* (Ps. 29:3)! The voice of the Lord resounding in the thunder speaks to us. Thunder calls us to worship! Stand in awe before the Lord, and give to God the glory due unto His name (Ps. 29:2). Trem-

ble in godly fear, and bend the knee before the high and lofty One, the God who “thundereth marvelously with His voice” (Job 37:5). When the thunder rumbles, let us humble ourselves before God. Let us trust in Him, and the power of His Word. “Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?” (Job 40:9). Tremble before Him. Tremble in reverential fear, but not in dread terror. For the Lord does not thunder against you, believing Christian. The lamb Samuel offered, turning the Lord’s thunder upon the Philistines (I Sam. 7:10), was but a picture of the Lamb of God who has turned the thunder of divine judgment away from you. *Jesus Christ!* Jesus came to bear the curse of the law, the thunder of God’s judgment. At Calvary, the Lord of hosts visited Jesus with thunder (Is. 29:6). The storm clouds shrouded the crucified Christ in deepest darkness, and the seven thunders of God’s holy wrath raged against Him, until the storm was spent and your sins were gone, washed away in the blood of Christ. The God of glory thundered against Christ your Savior (Ps. 29:3), therefore now “the Lord will bless his people with peace” (Ps. 29:11). This is the good news of the gospel! The Almighty God “thundereth marvelously” in the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Shall we not praise Him? The word thunder first appears in the Bible as a *plague* (Ex. 9:23). But the last time the word appears it describes *praise*. Revelation 19:6 describes the voice of the great multitude around the throne of God “*as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*” The thunderous chorus of the redeemed Bride of the Lamb! Already now, let us join our voices with that chorus of praise.



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. James Laning, home missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Zion PRC, Jenison, Michigan

God’s chosen, covenant people

Previous article in this series: May 1, 2023, p. 344.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.
Psalms 33:12

To what nation is the psalmist referring? Who are the people whom God has chosen as His own inheritance?

Many would say He is talking about Israel. In the Old Testament we read about God making His covenant with

Israel. He told them, “...thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath *chosen* thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.” So many would say Psalm 33:12 is speaking about Israel, and they would be correct.

Yet, then we come to the New Testament and read of the church as God’s chosen people. All those saved in

Christ were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). With them God dwells. They are His people, and He is their God.

The church is God's covenant people, just as Israel was God's covenant people. A common, dispensational-Baptist position is that these are two distinct peoples of God. Yet Israel and the church are not two separate peoples, but one. When Christ came, God's people were referred to as Israel. Now God's people are often called the church. Yet Israel and the church are two names for the same people. It is proper to say that the Israel we read of in the Old Testament was the church. It is also correct to refer to the church today as Israel. Israel was the church, and the church is Israel. The two names refer to one and the same people.¹

The last article was about the church as the kingdom of Christ. Now we consider the church as the chosen, covenant people of God.

God's chosen people: His covenant people

God's *chosen* people are His *covenant* people. God's everlasting covenant is with Christ and those chosen to be in Him (Gal. 3:16, 29). If someone is an elect, then he is one of God's covenant people. If he is one of God's covenant people, then he must be an elect. The elect and those in God's covenant are one and the same.²

Those whom God has chosen and with whom He has established His covenant are said to be *God's* people. Repeatedly in Scripture we come across a statement like "And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Jer. 30:22). That covenant promise really encapsulates what God's covenant is. It is a relationship of friendship between God and His people in Christ.

Indeed, only *in Christ* could we enjoy fellowship with God. How else could sinners such as ourselves enjoy fellowship with the holy God? For that to happen we needed Christ to redeem us and the Spirit of Christ to sanctify us. Only if Christ died for us, reconciling us to God, and only if the Spirit of God quickened us and sanctified us to be members of Christ could we consciously walk with God and commune with Him.

All those chosen and saved in Christ are united in Him. They are *one* in Christ, not *two* in Christ. They are mem-

bers of Christ's one bride, the church. The true believers who lived in the days before Christ were members of Christ's church, just as true believers are still today.

One of the differences between then and now is that back then the members of the church were almost exclusively from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Today they are mostly from those who are *not* blood descendants of Jacob.³ Another difference is that back then Israel had many ceremonial laws that have ceased since the coming of Christ. A third difference is that when God called Israel out of Egypt and brought them into Canaan, Israel was a nation with a portion of land having geographical boundaries. Today the church does not have any such boundary. Yet the people of God then and now are one. They are the one people who have Jehovah as their God and who truly enjoy fellowship with Him in Christ.⁴

Since Israel in the old dispensation was the same people that the church is today, throughout this section we will be referring to Israel in the Old Testament as an illustration.

God called His chosen people out of Egypt and gave them His Word at Mt. Sinai. This pictures for us the following:

1) Just as Israel was the one people who were called out and separated from the nations, so the church today is the one people who are separate from this world as His holy people.

2) Just as Israel received the Word of God, the church still today is the one people who are taught God's Word, and who receive that Word not only externally, but internally.

Let us consider these two points and some practical applications drawn from them.

The church: Those called out

God called His people out of Egypt that they might worship Him as His holy people. Back then God's people were to be separate from this world both physically and spiritually. Today the church is no longer physically separate from those of this world. We have, however, been spiritually separated from them, and are to walk as those who have truly "come out from among them" (II Cor. 6:17).

That we are to be separate from this world is indicated by the very word translated "church." The Greek

1 The modern-day nation of Israel and the church certainly are two different peoples. By Israel, however, I am referring not to that nation today that calls itself Israel, but to the true "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) referred to in Scripture as God's people.

2 In this article I am referring to the church as the body of Christ, consisting of all the elect. I am not talking about an instituted local church which may have unbelievers in it. I plan to discuss the distinction between the elect body of Christ and the church institute in a future article.

3 God continues today to gather His people also from the descendants of Jacob. It is just that now most of those gathered are not from that line but from the Gentiles.

4 I mention here some of the differences, but this is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

word translated “church” is *ecclesia*⁵ which means “a gathering of those who have been called out.” The term is sometimes used to refer to a secular assembly that has been summoned (Acts 19:39). When, however, it is used to refer to God’s people, it refers to them as those people whom God has called out, separated from this world, and assembled together as His holy people.

God’s covenant people are graciously called out, and all of them will be saved. God’s gracious call is efficacious.⁶ As the Spirit says, “whom he did predestinate, them he also called” (Rom. 8:30). That specific text goes on to say that all those whom God graciously calls He also justifies and glorifies. So, if God graciously calls someone, that person will certainly be saved.

Many deny that. It is commonly held that God desires to save all human beings, and that He graciously calls many who end up not being saved. Yet Romans 8:30 says God graciously calls those whom He has elected, and that all those whom He calls will be saved in Christ.

Together they are united in Him. They all have one Head and are all directed by His one Spirit.

The church: The people with God’s word

The people of Israel were the only people who heard God speak and lived. They were the one people whom God had taken out of another nation and revealed to them His Word.

In the days of Moses, God pointed this out to the Israelites:

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation...according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut. 4:32-34).

No other people were called out of another nation and heard God graciously speak to them.

What was said to Israel of old can be said of the church still today. No other people has been called out

of the nations of this world and united together as the one people to whom God graciously speaks.

Israel had God’s Word taught to them (Deut. 4:5-8), and that is true of the church still today. The church continues to be the one people who are truly taught God’s Word.

The members of the true church have God’s Word not only externally but also *internally*. Many unbelievers have a copy of the Scriptures. Those who are truly God’s covenant people, however, have God’s Word *within them*.

In the book of Jeremiah, we read of God’s *covenant* promise to His people that He would write His law *in their heart* (Jer. 31:33), “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Also, in the days of Moses, God said to His people: “the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (Deut. 30:14).

God’s covenant people then and now have God’s law. We have that law in our heart, so that we can and do begin to keep it. In this life we continue to struggle with sin, because each of us still has a sinful nature. Yet in our new spiritual heart we really do love God and desire to do what is pleasing to Him. Such can be said of only one people: the covenant people of the triune God.

“Be ye holy” as the Lord your God is holy

Our holy God who has written His Word in our heart, called us out and separated us from this world, calls us to imitate Him: “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Pet. 1:15-16).

Our holy Father did not separate us from this world so that we would go right back to living like the ungodly. He did not send His Son to save us *from sin* so that we could return to walking *in sin*.

We are *truly* to turn from sin and walk with our holy, covenant-keeping God. As our Lord says, “Ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God” (I Pet. 2:9). We are now the people of God, and we are to walk as children of light.

Let us remember what our Lord has done both for us and in us. May we glorify the One who has called us out of darkness, into *His* marvelous light. May it be evident to others that we are among those who are taught of God. May we show forth *His* praises, expressing with joy our thankfulness to be members of His one chosen, covenant people.

⁵ Matters having to do with the church are often called *ecclesiastical* matters. The term ecclesiastical comes from the Greek word for the church.

⁶ Efficacious means “having the power to produce the desired effect.” So, when we speak of God’s gracious call as “efficacious,” we mean that it has the power to produce the effect God desires. In other words, all those whom God desires to save He saves.



Pillar and ground of truth

Prof. Russell Dykstra, pastor of Byron Center PRC in Byron Center, Michigan

The Protestant Reformed Churches: Their beginnings (3): Common grace becomes the issue

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2023, p. 298.

The Janssen controversy in the Christian Reformed Church (1920-22) concerned the erroneous teaching of a professor in the theological school. Dr. Ralph Janssen's higher critical view of Scripture and his naturalist explanation of miracles were condemned by the CRC Synod of 1922. So serious were his errors that synod removed him as professor. However, his justification for these teachings, namely, common grace, was not addressed either by the special study committee that investigated his teaching or by the Synod of 1922.

Even during the controversy, the Revs. H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema saw the underlying relation between Janssen's errors and common grace, and argued that common grace should be addressed in the report on Janssen's teaching. The rest of the study committee, however, refused to take issue with common grace. Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema acquiesced.

For historical perspective, be aware that the teaching of common grace was relatively new in 1922. Although the *term* can be found in earlier theologians such as John Calvin, the concept was *developed* in a new and different way around the turn of the century. This development occurred primarily in the writings of two significant Reformed theologians in the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Abraham Kuyper unfolded this concept in his theological column in the weekly paper *De Heraut* (*The Herald*) from 1895 to 1901. Bavinck wrote his *Reformed Dogmatics* at about the same time. Common grace was hardly established Reformed doctrine in the 1920s. Nonetheless, one could scarcely find two more influential Reformed theologians in the world in 1920 than Kuyper and Bavinck.

These two theologians had tremendous influence on the Christian Reformed Church. Thousands of their followers emigrated to America and joined the CRC. Virtually every minister in the CRC knew the Dutch language and could read the works of Kuyper and Bavinck. Common grace, it seemed, was simply accepted by most ministers in the CRC.

In fact, some were actively promoting the thinking of common grace in the churches. A number of ministers

published a magazine for that purpose, *Religion and Culture*, which advocated broader acceptance of cultural standards. Their teaching was based on common grace, which, it was averred, was true Calvinism. In the words of Hoeksema, "Calvinism, always known the world over for its doctrine of predestination and particular grace, had been changed overnight into a philosophy of common grace!"¹

Hoeksema recounts that there were those in the denomination who were alarmed at this trend of broader acceptance of American culture. He wrote,

Men like Professors L. Berkhof, S. Volbeda, and K. Schoolland and the Reverends Y. P. De Jong, H. J. Kuiper, D. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, frequently discussed the lamentable condition of the churches in general and the rise of this new movement in particular, and for a time they even held their monthly meetings for this purpose. They all agreed that an attempt must be made to save the church from the inroads of Arminianism and from the grave danger of being swallowed up by the world.²

A number of these men, including Danhof and Hoeksema did more than talk. They started a new publication called *The Witness*, desiring to promote godliness and true Calvinism, as well as address some of the issues raised by Janssen.

In truth, the CRC was being influenced in no small

1 *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 1947), 16.

2 *The Protestant Reformed Churches*, 17. The list of names here is significant because these very men would later oppose Danhof and Hoeksema in their rejection of common grace. James A. De Jong in his biography, *Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church, 1907-1962* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007) confirms H. J. Kuiper's great concern about Janssen and about worldliness in the CRC; see especially pages 39-68. But as De Jong notes, when it came to common grace, "it was clear that his [H. J. Kuiper's] sympathies were not with Hoeksema and Danhof." In fact, H. J. Kuiper's consistory brought overtures to Classis Grand Rapids West that included "ask[ing] classis to require the consistories of Hope Church in River Bend and of the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo to compel their pastors, the Reverend G.M. Ophoff and the Reverend Henry Danhof, to indicate their support of the synod's statements on common grace" (pp. 56, 57).

way by the changing culture of the America. The “Roaring Twenties” was a time of dramatic social and economic change, marked by a notable loosening of morals. In the middle of that decade, the CRC indicated its recognition of the dangerous influence of the entertainment-crazed society with a synodically commissioned “Report on Worldly Amusements.” This was in response to several overtures to the 1926 CRC Synod, one of which stated, “It is the belief of Classis Illinois that the indulgence of worldly amusements, such as the theater- and movie-attendance, dancing and card playing is becoming a serious problem in the life of the church.”³

The “Report” concurred, stating, “If theater- and movie-attendance, dancing and card playing were indulged in only occasionally by members of our churches, consistories could afford to be lenient. But the situation, especially in some localities, is rather serious. Unless resolute measures are taken to combat these particular forms of worldliness, the situation may be irremediable before long” (47).

The CRC Synod of 1928 adopted many resolutions based on the Report and decided to publish it. The Report is worth reading especially because of the research done on the evils of movies and dancing, as well as its documentation of the church’s historical condemnation of these activities. It is noteworthy that the doctrine of the antithesis as separation from the world is weakened by a paragraph on how believers can have a moral common ground based on common grace (15, 16). It also opened the door to the possibility of good drama, and a “clean and wholesome play” (27, 28).

But worldliness was not the only problem, as noted above. A Protestant Reformed member who lived through the controversy of 1924 as a young man, later wrote his recollections in the *Beacon Lights*. One of the problems he recalled was doctrinal error in the church of his youth:

We ourselves discovered that we were holding to a two-track theology. On the one hand the Reformed view and on the other the Arminian and Pelagian. An example of this was the songs we as young people sang in our Young People’s societies and at various programs. Many of these were pure Arminian such as: “Throw Out the Life Line,” Whosoever Will,” “Jesus is Tenderly Calling” and more. We were never rebuked or admonished for this but certainly should have been.

He goes on to say that “in our debating and discussions on the three points of common grace with fellow Christians it became evident that Arminianism had tak-

en deep root, and many accepted the false doctrine of free willism.”⁴

It should be obvious then, that Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema and others had much reason to be concerned about the spiritual condition of their CRC churches. In addition, they were seeing evil fruits of this relatively new teaching, common grace. After the Synod of 1922 deposed Janssen, Danhof and Hoeksema began to sound the alarm. Their preaching stressed the Reformed doctrines of total depravity, sovereign particular grace, and eternal predestination. In that context they also rejected common grace.

Their objections began to appear in print. Hoeksema had already given some critical evaluation of common grace in his rubric “Our Doctrine” in the official CRC publication, *The Banner*. That medium was eventually closed to him. Danhof and Hoeksema told the staff of *The Witness* that they wanted to expand their critique of common grace, but the staff rejected that idea. Thus it was that they began to publish pamphlets, and eventually a book. With the *Banner* and *The Witness* closed to their writing on common grace, Danhof and Hoeksema began making plans for publishing a new magazine, the first issue of which came out in October of 1924, with the title the *Standard Bearer*.

Many of their pamphlets were in response to pamphlets of other CRC ministers critical of Danhof’s and Hoeksema’s rejection of common grace. Rev. Jan Karel VanBaalen wrote a pamphlet entitled *Denial of Common Grace, Reformed or Anabaptist?* and later, *Innovation and Error*. In *The Witness*, Prof. L. Berkhof published an article of great concern entitled “Grace for the Unconverted.” On their side, Hoeksema and Danhof printed three pamphlets—*Along Straight Paths*, then *For the Sake of Justice and Truth*, and *Not Anabaptist, But Reformed*. They also published a book, *Of Sin and Grace*, a historical and theological critique of Abraham Kuyper’s teaching of common grace.⁵

At the same time, protests were filed with the respective consistories against the preaching and teaching of Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema. In an amazingly short time, these protests lead to the official adopting of the Three Points of Common Grace by the CRC Synod of 1924, and shortly thereafter, to depositions of consistories and ministers who opposed common grace.

To this we turn next time.

4 Dick Kooienga, “The Time Around 1924,” *Beacon Lights* (March, 1975), 9.

5 These are the English titles of all these works that were first published in Dutch. The translated pamphlets of Danhof and Hoeksema were compiled and printed in 2015 by the RFPa in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*. The translated book *Of Sin and Grace* is also available from the RFPa (rfpa.org).

3 “Worldly Amusements in the Light of Scripture,” adopted by the CRC Synod in 1928, p. 4. For the rest of the citations, the page numbers are in parentheses in the article.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of Pittsburgh PRC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Protestant Reformed missions Years of rebuilding: Missions revived, 1954-1961 (1)

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2023, p. 228.

After the split in 1953, the Mission Committee was left to pick up the splinters left behind in its mission work. The Mission Committee reported to the 1954 meeting of synod that Rev. Andrew Cammenga was removed from his position as missionary due to his insistence that Rev. DeWolf along with the men of First Protestant Reformed Church (Grand Rapids) who followed him were the legal consistory of First PRC. It was also reported to this synod that “the Revs. Blankespoor, Kok, Knott, and elder Bouma were not present (at the meetings) because they had severed their relations with our churches.”¹ The PRC Synod took two actions. First, it elected a sufficient number of new committee members to bring the committee to its full contingent. Second, it instructed First PRC to call another missionary to carry on the work of missions.

At its next meeting in July, 1954 the Mission Committee presented to First PRC a gross list of six nominees for the calling of a missionary: R. Harbach, J. A. Heys, H.C. Hoeksema, G. Lubbers, M. Schipper, and G. Vandenberg. In January of the next year Rev. George Lubbers accepted the call to be home missionary. His initial work was in the Pella, Iowa area, but soon changed to other areas of the Midwest. The main focus of missions for the next several years would be in Colorado and the Dakotas among those who belonged to the Eureka Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS). This denomination of churches was also known as the German Reformed Church since it had been made up of German immigrants who came to America as early as 1725, settling in the East.

During the late 1800s a second wave of German immigrants from the southern regions of Russia settled in the Dakotas. Since they were German, it was natural for them to join themselves with the German Reformed Church (also called the RCUS). Soon after these im-

migrants joined this denomination, however, it became apparent that the RCUS was divided over what was known as the Mercersburg theology and its resulting liturgical controversies.² The German immigrants in the Dakotas vehemently objected to this error and in 1911 formed the Eureka Classis of the RCUS consisting at that time of seven ministers and sixteen congregations.

Due to the influence of the Mercersburg theology, the RCUS voted in 1934 to merge with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Eureka Classis opposed this union and officially voted against its constitution in 1936. But in 1940 the merger finally became official and the RCUS now became known as the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The Eureka Classis refused to be a part of this union and as early as 1940 resolved to be the continuing body of the RCUS. This resolution was finalized in 1945 when the Eureka Classis became incorporated in the state of North Dakota as the legal continuation of the RCUS. At that time the Classis consisted of 10 pastors and twenty-eight congregations.

We offer this brief history because between 1940 (the year of the merger) and 1945 when the Eureka Classis constituted itself as the continuing RCUS, a couple of pastors of these congregations were seeking a “different and better church connection,”³ possibly with the Protestant Reformed Churches. The synodical committee submitted a detailed report of this contact to the Synod of 1945 (pp. 41-47). What follows are a few highlights of that report.

In 1943 a Rev. U. Zogg, pastor of a church in the Eureka Classis in Scotland, South Dakota, having heard the “Sovereign Grace Hour,” a radio broadcast aired by the PRC in the Midwest, contacted several of our ministers.

1 1954 *Acts of Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, pp. 39, 40.

2 The Mercersburg theology arose out of the RCUS seminary in Mercersburg, PA. Its main proponent was Philip Schaff who through his mystical error concerning Christ’s incarnation was sympathetic with Roman Catholicism. Those interested in this controversy can research it themselves on the Internet.

3 1945 *Acts of Synod*, p. 42.

In an attempt to seek closer contact with him, a committee of ministers from our midwest churches met several times with him and Rev. W. Korn of Menno, SD. Revs. Zogg and Korn together with several other ministers of the Eureka Classis “expressed their desire for a conference with the Rev. H. Hoeksema and our midwestern ministers on the one hand, and as many as possible of their number, both ministers and elders, on the other hand.”⁴ The synodical committee scheduled this conference for September 20 and 21, 1944. Nine PRCA ministers and three students met together with eleven ministers and fourteen elders of the RCUS. Rev. Hoeksema lectured and preached four times in the German language. The conference was determined a success.

But according to the report of the synodical committee, there were quite a few differences between the two denominations. Most of the matters that were included on the agenda were not discussed:

The agendum was made up of matters and dogmas which might be differently expressed or confessed by the German Reformed brethren than by us. On the dogmatic field we proposed to confer about the Organic Conception of Predestination, the Covenant of God, the Natures of Christ, the Connection between Justification and Sanctification, Infant Baptism and Premillennialism. Regarding church political questions we noted the different Ecclesiastical Bodies and the relation between them, the Form of Discipline and the question whether or not it is practiced, their Acquaintance with the Three Forms of Unity and our Church Order, and Women Suffrage in the Church. As to the matters of a more or less practical nature, we proposed to treat of the Confirmation question, Unionism, Christian Education, Americanization, Divorce, Worldly Amusements, Missions, Binding of the Confession and the Forms for the administration of the Sacraments, the Use of Hymns in distinction from Psalms in Public Worship, What is Meant by Trinity Sunday, the Status of Deaconess, Who is Authorized to Present Children to be Baptized, Holy Supper, and under that, the so-called Open Table and its administration to the aged and sick, and the Burial Service.⁵

This agenda certainly highlights the differences that existed between the two denominations, but this did not seem to deter our churches from pressing ahead with further contact with the Eureka Classis. In fact, it was reported that our men who attended the conference of 1944 actually advised the brothers of the Eureka Classis to push toward the incorporation of their churches as the RCUS.⁶

The results of this conference were, first of all, representatives of the RCUS attending the 1945 PRC Synod and, secondly, official correspondence from their newly organized synod was received. In this correspondence four suggestions were made: 1. That our churches appoint a committee to study the confessional standards of the RCUS; 2. that fraternal delegates be sent from our synod to theirs and vice versa; 3. that we open the doors of our seminary to young men of their churches; 4. that we arrange for more conferences between our churches to come to an understanding of one another’s position regarding the Reformed truth and life.

The 1945 Synod for the most part agreed with these suggestions, except for the organizing of another conference, which it felt did not belong to the jurisdiction of the synod. It seemed at this point as if an optimistic and fruitful future between the denominations had begun. But for some reason this was not to last.

The Committee appointed by the 1945 Synod reported the following to the 1946 Synod. First, the only confessional standard of the RCUS is the Heidelberg Catechism.⁷ Second, two men visited the classis of the RCUS convening in Upham, ND in May 1946. They brought our churches’ greetings and informed them of our approval of having their men attend our seminary. Third, their men “feel that in our churches they have a strong ally in the cause of the truth which they love and seek. Although these churches have been in a disorganized state for some years, we are happy to report that they are now more organized and are putting forth every effort toward a more solid organization so as to be able to cultivate the tremendous field in which they have been called to labor.”⁸ Nothing more was reported.

In 1947 one can sense a bit of agitation on the part the delegates of our synod. The RCUS did not send representatives to our synod even though we had sent two men to their classis that met in Leola, SD on May 26, 1947. In their report our representatives hinted at some struggles the RCUS was having. These were not spelled out, however. The decision was taken that our churches send representatives to the next classis of the RCUS in 1948. No mention was made of a conference. No mention was made of their sending potential students to our seminary.

In 1948 less yet was reported. The synod was informed that the RCUS classis was not meeting until June 21, three weeks after our meeting of synod. Once again,

4 1945 Acts of Synod, p. 42.

5 1945 Acts of Synod, p. 44.

6 1945 Acts of Synod, p. 45.

7 Sometime soon after 1793, the RCUS (yet known as the German Reformed Church) decided to discard the Canons of Dordt and the Belgic Confession. This would explain why the RCUS many years later in 1945 maintained only the Heidelberg Catechism.

8 1946 Acts of Synod, p. 79.

representatives of their classis were absent at this synod. It was voted to send representatives to their next meeting.

The 1949 Synod then rolled around. There are no representatives of the RCUS at our synod—again. But our representatives had visited their classis in 1948. They had conveyed the greetings of our churches and encouraged them in their struggles for the truth. They also reminded the men of their classis that they had not sent representatives to our synod for the past few years. The men of their classis conveyed their regret to our churches but that the meeting of our synod conflicted with their confirmation classes making it impractical for them to attend. They proposed that instead of sending representatives to our synods we continue the conferences that had not materialized since 1944.

A motion was made and supported “to accept the regrets expressed by the RCUS and to appoint Rev. P. De-Boer and Rev. J. VanWeelden as a committee to represent us at their next classical meeting the coming year.”⁹ This motion was defeated. A defeated motion requires no grounds and for that reason we do not know why the synod decided no longer to send representatives to the

RCUS synod. No conferences were scheduled after this. Neither did our seminary receive any of their students.

We can surmise that one of the reasons was that the RCUS was getting cold feet because of the many doctrinal, confessional, and practical differences between our two denominations. Perhaps another reason the RCUS may have shied away from us is the doctrinal controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches that was beginning to heat up. Who would want to become enmeshed in our controversy? Whatever the case, our denomination’s relationship to the RCUS suddenly waxed cold.

We do know this. Two of the leading ministers in the RCUS during these years of contact with us began to encourage young men of their fledgling denomination to attend Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. The first student of their churches enrolled in this seminary in 1953, the year of our split. This led, in turn, to formal ties between the RCUS and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1960. The churches in the RCUS found fellowship elsewhere than with our churches. But this was not true of all of them. Three congregations from this denomination would in years to come turn to the PRCA for organization as churches in our federation. This work for the most part constituted our mission work during the 1950s. Of that we learn in our next article.

9 1949 *Acts of Synod*, p. 60, Art. 29.



Translated treasures

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

Introduction to Johannes Jansen’s *A Brief Explanation of the Church Order*

Who was Johannes Jansen?

Johannes Jansen was born on January 19, 1873, in Varsseveld, Gelderland.¹ His father, a farmer, was also named Johannes Jansen, and his mother was Berendina Johanna Rademaker. He grew up as a member of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands), the churches of the Afscheiding.

In 1892, the same year that the churches of the Afscheiding united with the churches of Abraham Kuyper’s Doleantie to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederlands* (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands), Jansen began his studies for the ministry of the gospel at

the Theological School in Kampen. These were tumultuous times at Kampen, culminating in the departure of two of her professors, Herman Bavinck and Petrus Biesterveld, to join Kuyper’s Free University in 1902.

In 1901, after graduation, Jansen was ordained as pastor of the Reformed Church in ‘s-Gravenmoer, North Brabant. He later served pastorates in Nieuw-Buinen, Drenthe (1904-6); Burum, Friesland (1906-15); Ten Boer, Groningen (1915-1922); Ijmuiden, North Holland (1922-26); and Wierden, Overijssel (1926-1935).

Jansen was married on April 19, 1906, to Geertina Willemina Warringa (1883-1968), and together they celebrated fifty years of marriage.

Jansen died on May 26, 1956, in Veenwouden, Friesland.

In addition to the regular work of a pastor, Jansen

1 For much of this biographical information, I depended upon T. B. vanHouten, “Jansen, Johannes,” *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988), 3:196-197, <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl>.

spent considerable time researching and writing on the subject of Reformed church polity. Along with his contemporary and colleague Harm Bouwman (1863-1933), he came to be recognized in the Dutch Reformed churches as a reliable authority on the subject. In 1913, he published his first work, a lengthy explanation of the process of church discipline. In 1917, he published the first volume of what was intended to be a lengthy, multi-volume explanation of the Church Order, but work on this stopped due to the high costs involved. In 1923, he published a brief explanation of the Church Order, entitled *Korte verklaring van de kerkenordening* (*A Brief Explanation of the Church Order*). This work was tremendously popular, evident from the fact that it went through three editions during his lifetime.

Why this translation?

What follows here and in the next number of issues of the *Standard Bearer* is my translation of Jansen's *Korte verklaring* on the subject of church discipline (Articles 71-80 of the Church Order).²

² For this translation I used Johannes Jansen, *Korte verklaring van de kerkenordening* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1923).

The rationale behind the translation was to make available to English readers a bit of the great wealth of material on the subject of church polity that is found in the Dutch language. English speakers are largely dependent on VanDellen and Monsma's commentary on the Church Order. While VanDellen and Monsma's work is very worthwhile, the danger is that we are limited to the opinion of only one commentary. By providing a translation of Jansen's commentary, readers will benefit from having another respected resource on church polity, a resource that in places offers a different opinion than VanDellen and Monsma. (Readers will also be able to see how dependent VanDellen and Monsma were on Jansen.) Hopefully, this provides a greater appreciation for the wealth of solid material left us in the writings of our Dutch Reformed forefathers.

The decision was made initially to translate the section of Jansen's work on church discipline because of the importance of church discipline in the life of the church, and to promote a deeper understanding of this work both on the part of elders and members in the pew.

[Now follows Jansen's exposition of the Reformed Church Order's initial article on church discipline.]

“Ecclesiastical censure”

Article 71: As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censures, to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbor and to remove the offense out of the church of Christ.

This article deals by way of introduction with the character, necessity, object, and purpose of discipline.

1. *The character of discipline.* The article states at the outset that Christian punishment is *spiritual* and exempts (i.e., releases or dismisses) no one from civil punishment. The churches spoke this deliberately to the government. They had asked her for the political approbation (approval) of the Church Order, so that it would acquire the character of a national law for the churches and would exercise more authority. But the government feared that the churches would extend their power beyond their borders over those things which did not belong to them, that is, they would also assume civil power. To reassure her now, and still to obtain political approbation, the churches explained here that discipline bears a *spiritual* character and dismisses none of her members from civil punishment. Suppose that someone (i.e., one of her members) has

committed a sin of theft or murder and, after admonition by the church, comes to sincere repentance and reconciliation with her, this does not release him from civil punishment. A murderer, although reconciled to God and the church, would still have to undergo the punishment demanded by the court, even the death penalty. Church discipline does not eliminate government punishment.

Church discipline is a *Christian* punishment and bears a *spiritual* character. It arises from the spiritual power that Christ bestows on His church (Matt. 20:28; Eph. 4:11); is administered by officebearers whom Christ gives to His church (I Cor. 12:28; Heb. 5:4); is practiced with spiritual weapons of conviction, admonition, warning, censure, and cutting off (II Cor. 10:4); and is intended for the salvation of souls, the purification of the church, and the glory of God (Eph. 4:12; 6:10-18). Government power, on the other hand, arises from God as Creator, is administered by the secular government, maintains itself by the power of the sword, and is intended for the maintenance of order and law in the civil state.

2. *The necessity of discipline.* This rests on the following grounds:

a. The ban in the Old Testament, whereby the Lord protected Israel outwardly from the seven neighboring Canaanite nations who were cut off at His command (Deut. 7:1-11; 20:15-18); and whereby He sanctified them inwardly, because an idolater (Ex. 22:20), a blasphemer (Lev. 24:11-16), etc., were to be cut off from their midst by the ban.³

b. The discipline of the synagogue, which came into being in and after the captivity to keep the Jewish people in the dispersion from intermingling (Ezra 10:8). It consisted of three degrees, namely the *Nidui* or lesser degree, the *Schamatta* or heavier punishment, and the *Cherem* or cutting off. Also in the New Testament we find some traces of it, namely in Luke 6:22; John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2.

c. The key power of the apostles, which Christ gave first to Peter (Matt. 16:19) and thereafter to all the apostles (Matt. 18:18; John 20:23). It was an extraordinary power *infallibly* to determine entry into and exclusion from the kingdom of heaven.

d. Discipline in the New Testament church. Proper church discipline in a narrow sense arose from the key power of the apostles. In origin they are indeed one, like root and plant, for Christ is the source of both; but in degree there is a distinction, because the key power is an extraordinary power of the apostles, while discipline has an ordinary or common character. Concerning the key power in a narrow sense, there are only the three texts (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23), while church discipline is based on many more texts, such as Rom. 16:17, 18; I Cor. 5:2, 13; I Thess. 5:14; II Thess. 3:6, 14; I Tim. 5:2; Tit. 3:10; Rev. 2:2, 14, 20.

3. *The object of discipline.* Article 71 says that discipline seeks to reconcile the *sinner* with the church, etc. The object of discipline is therefore the *sinner*, i.e., a member of the church who makes himself guilty of a censurable sin. Nothing more than that is said. Further elaboration of the objects of discipline follows:

a. *Confessing members of the church*, who make themselves guilty of a censurable sin, namely: *living persons*, no lifeless objects (writings, buildings, coun-

tries), no dead ones (false teachers, heretics, systems of doctrine), no mass of members at the same time (innocent as well as guilty).

Furthermore: *members of the church*; not all baptized both those outside the church and within it (Rome); not those who terminate their membership orally or in writing and persist in it or who actually join another denomination and after admonition remain there, or someone who has left for another church with a certificate and refuses to hand in his certificate there. With regard to members who no longer sympathize with the church, who constantly attend elsewhere, or who edify themselves but in the opinion of the consistory cannot be cut off by excommunication, the Synod of the Hague (1914, Art. 140) ruled that in such cases “the consistory alone may be advised to proceed with admonition of these persons, to keep them away from the Lord’s Supper if need be,” without cutting them off by excommunication.⁴

Third: *guilty members of the church*, who are *chargeable*; not a multitude of members at the same time, so that the innocent are struck down with the guilty, as was the case with the interdict of Rome; nor madmen, whose words and deeds cannot be imputed and are not sins worthy of discipline.

And finally *all members* of the church, rich and poor, authorities and subjects; thus also emperors and kings, judges and officers, mayors and notaries, etc. Rome excluded the pope as chief of the church, and the Episcopal and Lutheran churches excluded government officials. But this is contrary to the Scripture. Christ alone is the infallible King of the church. One is your Master, and you are all brothers.

b. *Baptized members of the church.* Already the *baptized children*, as members of the church, are objects of discipline. But because they are still incomplete members, the discipline is also incomplete and consists of exhortation, admonition, warning, correction, etc. In case a child of the congregation leads a loose life, visits the pubs, does not come to catechism, etc., it must first be addressed with the parents, because the error may lie in the upbringing. But the children themselves are also objects of admonition and discipline. Paul also directly admonished the children themselves, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right,” (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Also *baptized adults*, “who in adulthood through their own fault do not yet come to church confession and commitment,” are objects of discipline.

3 The idea of the “ban” in the Old Testament referred to cutting off a person by exterminating them or devoting them to death, as in the passages listed here by Jansen. In the Middle Ages, the idea of the ban came to mean being officially declared an outlaw, thus being expelled from one’s place of residence and losing all one’s rights and privileges. In Reformed church polity, the language of the ban came to refer to one being excommunicated out of the church and cut off from membership. In cases where Jansen uses the word *ban* in this latter sense, I have translated it as “excommunication” or “cutting off” to avoid any uncertainty as to what he means by the ban.

4 The Dutch original of this minute can be found online here: http://www.kerkrecht.nl/sites/default/files/ActaGKN1914_2.pdf.

They must be taught earnestly to come to confession of faith. In cases of persistent indifference, they should be admonished head for head. And if these exhortations are ineffective, they must be declared ecclesiastically by way of excommunication to no longer belong to the church. They themselves therefore cease to be objects of discipline.

c. *The supervision of Reformed associations.* The church also has a calling to oversee associations dealing with the explanation of God's Word and the confession of the church. After all, she must watch over the public interpretation of God's Word and the maintenance of her confession. The federation of Reformed youth associations has therefore on the advice of Prof. Dr. H. H. Kuyper at the Bundestag in Leeuwarden (1907) expressly accepted ecclesiastical supervision "as far as matters of religion are concerned, especially the interpretation of God's Word and the maintenance of the confession."

And with regard to the supervision of the Reformed schools, the Synod of Leeuwarden (1920) has stated extensively and emphatically "that the consistories...must try to obtain supervision both of the suitability of the teachers and the religious content of their education" (cf. *Acts of Leeuwarden*, 1920, p. 248).⁵

4. *The purpose of discipline*, according to the conclusion of the article, is twofold: first, "to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbor," and second, "to remove the offense out of the church of Christ." Calvin had one more purpose, namely: "to keep the name of the Lord holy." There are more descriptions. Voetius even mentions seven points. But Calvin's three purposes are clearest and correct.

⁵ These minutes can be found online here: <http://www.kerkrecht.nl/sites/default/files/ActaGKN1920.pdf>.



Pertaining to the churches in common Sister churches

Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland

Covenant PR Church Ballymena, NI

14 July, 2023

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Singapore and Malaysia

In January, Mary and I were invited to the June Camp of our mutual sister church, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) of Singapore. I was asked to unfold the CERC's 2023 and 2024 theme text, Nehemiah 2:17-18, in four lectures.

Ministers, like everyone else, have parts of Scripture with which they are less familiar. The book of Nehemiah was one of mine. So I ordered several works or commentaries on Nehemiah, and I have grown more and more impressed with this inspired book. On 23 April, I began preaching on Nehemiah for the edification of the saints in the CERC in Northern Ireland and in preparation for the CERC's Camp in peninsular Malaysia to the north of Singapore.

Working especially with Nehemiah 1-6, I developed the Camp's theme "Come, Let Us Build the Walls!" in four speeches: 1) "The Idea of the Church's Walls," 2) "Building the Walls Together," 3) "Opposition From Without" and 4) "Opposition From Within." With the lectures prepared, and group discussion questions and diagrams/maps of Jerusalem's landmarks and the work teams on its walls emailed to Singapore for inclusion in the Camp booklet, Mary and I flew east via Doha in Qatar, arriving in Changi Airport on the morning of Friday, 16 June.

Our approximately 10 days in SE Asia were divided fairly equally between Singapore and Malaysia. Meng Hsien and Serene were our main guides, with Yoon Chuan and Jee Fung ably deputising. It was wonderful to renew fellowship with saints in the CERC after our fairly brief visit in 2014 and to get to know other believers in our sister church—over meals, during tours, in homes, dropping in at the youth camp, at the Lord's day



meetings, and at Pulau Springs, the resort in Malaysia where the Camp was held (19-22 June). Singaporean sights, Chinese culture, and even Portuguese, Dutch, and British history in Malacca, are best enjoyed in the company of the Lord's people!

Two members of the PRC were present: Ed Bos from Lacombe in Canada and Rachel Buiters from Redlands in California. Tim Spence of the CPRC in Northern Ireland joined us from Australia, where he is currently working as a doctor and worshipping with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). A friend with whom I have corresponded for several years and our Chinese translator, Hwee Tiong Tan of Kuala Lumpur, attended the four speeches at the Camp, with his wife, Constance. I also met Jeffrey Setiawan, with whom I have had contact through Facebook, when he attended the services on our second Sunday with the CERC accompanied by brother Marcus.

Along with four speeches during the Camp and four Sunday sermons (18 and 25 June), I gave a presentation, with a couple of slides, on our church in Northern Ireland during the afternoon of our first Lord's day with the CERC. All too soon, however, our time in Singapore came to an end and we flew west very early on Monday, 26 June.

Cheryl Lim of the CERC is to move to the Ballymena area in September and stay in Northern Ireland for a year while she attends some university lectures in England. It will be great to have her with us. Others from our sister church in Singapore hope to visit us in the future, including at the next British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) conference at Cloverley Hall in England, where Prof. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Ronald Hanks will treat the grand subject of biblical eschatology (3-10 August, 2024).

Rev. Jim Laning and activities

Rev. James and Margaret Laning kindly agreed to come to Northern Ireland (13-26 June), while Mary and I were in SE Asia. Since this was their first time in our country, it was especially good that we had a couple of days with the Lanings at our house to help them settle in before we left.

We visited some of the sights together, like the Giant's Causeway, ate out at restaurants, and talked about mission work—something especially relevant since Rev. Laning is the new Protestant Reformed home missionary. It was lovely to spend time with the Lanings.



The *Ballymena Guardian* carried an article I sent them, "Former US Flight Officer to Preach in Covenant Church" (15 June), along with a photo of Rev. Laning standing behind a pulpit. The four fine sermons on Acts and I Thessalonians that he preached in the CPRC are on-line in audio and video (www.cprc.co.uk/visiting-preachers). After the evening service on their last Lord's day in our congregation, the ladies laid on tea and sandwiches, etc., as a farewell to the Lanings (25 June).

Besides the visit of the Lanings, we have had the benefit of communion with members from various Protestant Reformed churches in the last three months: Keith and Cheryl van Drunen (Crete), Bonnie Meelker (Hope,



Redlands), Pete and Marilyn Adams (First, Grand Rapids), and Bob, Carolyn, and Briana Prins (Trinity, Hudsonville). Other visitors from the U.S. include Brian and Kathy Gesch from Wisconsin, and Creighton and Carol Baldwin from North Carolina.

Six Reformed Hungarians stayed with us at the manse for a week (17-24 April). Pastor János and his wife, Alexandra, and Bálint and Kati with their young children Illangó and Daniel were excellent Christian company. They joined us for our Sunday services, church Bible studies, family devotions, etc. One windy day, we accompanied them on a trip to County Down for some beautiful mountain, lake, and coastal hikes.

On Easter Monday (10 April), some in the church, especially among the younger families, enjoyed a picnic at Glenariff Forest Park followed by a beautiful waterfall walk. Gerard and Claire Smith from Dublin, along with their baby Jacob, joined us. We have gotten to know Ger in the last several months and this was the first time his family has been able to stay in the Ballymena area for a long weekend in order to be with us.

On Friday 26 May, we held a congregational barbecue at the manse. The weather and fellowship were warm, and we had a good game of football too.

In April, our five Monday night catechism classes ended with tests and our Wednesday night *Belgic Confession* class on the end times finished for the season after our fifth meeting on global preaching as a sign of our Saviour's return (www.cprc.co.uk/belgic-confession-class). This freed up time for family visitation, which started on 1 May, with Ephesians 4 as our Scripture passage.

Our Tuesday morning Bible studies continue through the summer. We critiqued the Roman Catholic view of the relation between faith and love, including unformed and formed faith, preparation for justification, etc., and interacting with key sections in the deceitful counter-Reformation *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (1545-1563). Currently, we are looking at the view of faith in Pentecostalism, Char-

ismaticism, and the Third Wave, especially in connection with the Renewalist view of the "baptism with the Holy Spirit."

Websites and translations

Stephen Murray uploaded both the four meetings and the four speeches of the Malaysian Camp on "Come, Let Us Build the Walls!" to the CPRC YouTube page (www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI). Our thanks also go to Jotham Chin and others in the CERC for making and passing on to us their video and audio recordings.

Now over 6,000 people have signed up for push notifications on the main CPRC website (www.cprc.co.uk). This means that a short message appears as a pop-up on their computers, smart phones, or devices whenever Mary creates a new webpage, which results in more people accessing our articles, audios, and videos, and being edified thereby.

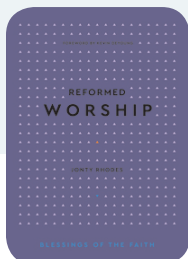
With the addition of "Angels and Demons," "Particular Atonement," and "Union with Christ," we have 40 online "Topical Resources" pages (www.cprc.co.uk/topical-resources). These helpful webpages draw together articles, audios, books, *Covenant Reformed News* pieces, pamphlets, quotes, videos, etc., from our website, as well as off-site materials, that deal with a particular subject.

After many years and numerous requests, we have finally created a webpage on the history of the CPRC (www.cprc.co.uk/history-of-the-cprc). It contains articles, audios, charts, conferences, lectures, letters, photos, programmes, reports, sermons, speeches, videos, etc., on various aspects of the history of our congregation. Now any PR student doing a school project on our church knows where to start!

Mary has added 61 translations to our website in the 3½ months since our last letter on 31 March (www.cprc.co.uk/languages). Most of these are in European languages: 24 Polish, 11 Spanish, 9 Hungarian, 5 Russian, and 2 Italian. A new translator, Reynardt from South Africa, sent us 5 pieces in Afrikaans. Lilian in Kenya translated 2 more articles into Swahili. Fiaz in Pakistan emailed us his first Urdu translation. A pastor from Nebraska forwarded us attachments containing the *Heidelberg Catechism* in Japanese. Rev. Vernon Ibe in the Philippines graciously sent us his Tagalog translation of Herman Hoeksema's "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine." Our thousands of translated pages probably receive more hits than our English materials!

May the Lord bless and keep you,

Yours in Christ Jesus,
Rev. and Mary Stewart



Bring the books...

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

The following book is reviewed by Prof. Cory Griess, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jonty Rhodes. *Reformed Worship*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2023. ISBN: 9781629959078. Hard cover. Price: \$15.99. 152 pages.

Reformed church worship is not necessarily the same as worship in a Reformed church.

Given the fact that we live in a day and age when the superficial reigns, even in the worship of some Reformed churches, and the expectation is that one's own desires take the role of worship leader, it is important that God's people continue to hear sermons and read books about Reformed worship. This is especially true if the material is given in such a way that it not only discusses the negative—what ought we not do, but the positive—what ought we do, and why is it marvelous that it is so? After all, the regulative principle is not first of all, What may we *not* do in worship? It is relentlessly positive: What *is* commanded!? And why has the good God who loves His children commanded it?

This little book takes this kind of approach, and in so doing leaves the Reformed heart wanting to meet with its God in biblical worship on the Lord's Day. I commend Jonty Rhodes's work to God's people. The book is short, faithful, and fresh. Here is a man who understands the scriptural principles of Reformed worship *and also loves them*, urging the church to embrace the beauty of them.

Rhodes organizes his book around six "P's." The first is the *promise* of worship, which is the glorious truth that we meet with God in public corporate worship. Here, a simple definition of worship naturally arises: "Worship is the right response to meeting God."

The second "P" is the *purpose* of worship. The purpose of worship is to give God the honor He is due as our God and Father. He is the One who has given us all things in the covenant, and our fitting response is to acknowledge Him in a way that extols Him for who He is and what He has done for us. However, Rhodes reminds us, God does not lack anything in Himself. The purpose of worship is not to give God what He *needs* from us. Rather, when we give Him what is His due, He is pleased, and we are blessed.

The *principle* is next. The reference is to the regulative principle, which Rhodes handles well, drawing out of Scripture things new and old. Since God is the Author of our entire salvation in His covenant, He is Author and Director of the great public meeting of the covenant. Rhodes proves the principle from Scripture and then makes a sig-

nificant point: God promises that He will meet us in the elements He has commanded for public, corporate worship. It is not as though God *cannot* meet with His people another way, but He has told us He will *surely* meet with us in these ordained means. If so, why would we attempt to meet with Him through other means?

The *power* and *pillars* of worship are chapter four's references to the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit as the power God uses to come close to us and bring us close to Him, and the elements of worship that are ordained by God to carry that Word. Rhodes rightly distinguishes elements from circumstances in this chapter.

Finally, *Reformed Worship* gives instruction on the *pattern* of worship. Here, the book explains how the worship service is carried out as a dialogue between God and His people. This dialogue has a gospel hue to it, shaped by the fact that our relationship to God is one where He has saved sinners to Himself. Because of this (and because it is historically Reformed) Rhodes gives the corporate confession of sin and assurance of pardon as part of the Reformed worship service. We ought to give more thought to restoring this historically Reformed practice in our own worship services.

Rhodes does little to prove the dialogical nature of worship scripturally. As one of the most significant realities about corporate worship, this is a regrettable weakness of the book. When Rhodes describes the gospel-shaped structure of worship from the Old Testament, there is an *implied* proof for the dialogue of worship. However, much more could and should be done to show this principle is tied to the nature of the covenant and therefore is found throughout Scripture.

The book ends with helpful Q&As on various significant topics including the question of exclusive psalmody. As is typical in a book intended for a broad audience, Rhodes does not take a position, but gives both sides of the argument while commending the Psalms for worship. Happily, questions that are common in our day, like, "Shouldn't we be creative in worship?" and "Isn't all of life worship?" are asked and helpfully answered.

The book should speak well to those new to Reformed worship as well as to those who have known it all their lives but who need to recapture the joy of what God has ordained.

Announcements

Resolutions of sympathy

On behalf of Randolph PRC, the Council expresses Christian sympathy to Gary and Jeanne Buteyn, Brian and Becky Buteyn, Paul and Vanessa Buteyn and their families in the death of their daughter and sister, **Stephanie Buteyn**. She died July 16 at the age of 40. Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Lou Regnerus, President

Jeff Krossschell, Clerk

On behalf of Randolph PRC, the Council expresses Christian sympathy to Bob and Jackie Hoekstra in the death of Jackie's sister, **Judy Abel**, who died June 19 at the age of 79. Revelation 21:4: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Lou Regnerus, President

Jeff Krossschell, 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

RFPA Annual Meeting

Title of speech: "Spreading the Reformed Gospel to the Four Corners of the Earth"

Speaker: Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Setting: Grandville PRC

4320 40th St. SW

Grandville, MI 49418

Date and time: September 28, 2023, 7 P.M.

Extras: See displays of our current RFPA translations, learn about translated works in progress (made possible by donations and the leveled membership program), and catch up on current mission efforts. Also, 'meet' our translators from Mexico, Brazil, India, and beyond!

Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness to God, we celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of **Art and Eleanor Boer**. Mom and Dad, when God united you in marriage on September 7, fifty years ago, He joined two selfless, kind-hearted, and Christ-like individuals. Through these years, God has used you not only to bless our family with a strong foundation of faith, but He has also used you for Christian service to His church—where the simple gift of homemade pies comes with two smiling visitors and godly conversation. Now with spouses and children of our own, we see the value of our Christian upbringing and we pray to be parents of your quality, showing the love of Christ to our children; may we also be generous with using our talents in the service of others as you have done for so many years. May God bless you in the years to come and continue to use your marriage for His service.

Love, Barry and Vicky, Dave and Kim, Josh and Bonnie and your 12 grandchildren

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

Seminary Convocation

The annual convocation of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary will be hosted by Hope PRC (GR) on Wednesday, September 6, at 7 P.M. All are invited to join with faculty, students, and the Theological School Committee as we call on the Lord and seek His blessing on the upcoming school year. Prof. B. Huizinga will speak on "The Protestant Reformed Minister Today," and the PRSO will perform a special number.

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

September 3—The Emergence of the Anti-Christian Kingdom
Revelation 17:9-17

September 10—The Man of Sin Revealed
II Thessalonians 2:3, 4

September 17—Peace Shall Destroy Many
Daniel 8:23-25

September 24—The Great Tribulation
Matthew 24:9-22