

The Standard Bearer

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Rejoice, pray, and give thanks

Rev. John Marcus

What must I do?

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Be strong

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Radioactive dating

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

**The other side
of the coin:
The Supreme Court
considers freedom
of conscience**

Mr. Brian VanEngen



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Meditation

Rev. John Marcus, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta

Rejoice, pray, and give thanks

“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

This text applies to men and women, old and young, rich and poor, married and single people. Nevertheless, I make special application to those who are married because marriage is under attack these days.

God’s Word to married couples (and to every child of God in every circumstance) is “Rejoice evermore.”

Someone might say, “It’s easy to rejoice on the day of your wedding as you look forward to spending the future together. It’s easy to rejoice when everything is going smoothly. But just wait until you have a big argument. Wait until reality sets in. Wait until you lose your job and don’t know how you are going to make the payments on your house. Rejoicing evermore sounds good in theory, but wait until you catch a glimpse of real life.” In the midst of difficult circumstances our flesh asks, “Am I supposed to rejoice even in this?” So, it behooves us to understand what it means to rejoice.

Rejoicing is not about jumping up and down when our favorite football team scores a touchdown. Rejoicing is not about laughing when we understand a joke. Rejoicing goes beyond that; the inspired apostle is talking about a *spiritual* rejoicing. Rejoicing is a deep-seated, habitual cheerfulness that arises from the heart such that we are calmly happy in the midst of our circumstances. It involves quietness and contentment in our souls.

Rejoice!

Strikingly, the text adds the words “evermore” to the exhortation.

We can see why we might rejoice on the occasion of a marriage; but must we also rejoice when we lose our spouse? Rejoicing seems appropriate when we receive children from God; but must we also rejoice when we lose a child in his/her infancy? We can rejoice when things are going smoothly; but what about in great trials and afflictions? Must we truly rejoice in *all* our circumstances?

No doubt, every couple will face good times and bad, sickness and health, better and worse. But, God’s Word to us in every circumstance is, “Rejoice evermore.”

By nature, none of us could ever do that. We might have a certain level of quietness and contentment when things are outwardly going well. By nature, we might put up with trials; but, we would never rejoice in them. By nature, we would view all those things as being against us.

Furthermore, apart from God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ, we have nothing substantial to rejoice about. Apart from God and His grace, we would be like honeymooners on the last voyage of the Titanic, oblivious to the true nature of our circumstances. As long as we deserve God’s wrath, there is no good reason to rejoice.

How can we have quietness and contentment in our souls? How can we rejoice evermore? The answer must not arise from earthly wealth or prosperity or any other circumstance. It must arise out of God-given faith and the eternal life we have in Jesus Christ. Only when God heals our consciences by faith and only when grace stills our earthly affections can we truly rejoice. Our rejoicing must be a joy in the Lord (cf. Phil. 4:4). It must flow out of the blessed forgiveness we have in the blood of Jesus Christ. It must ever focus on the work of Christ for us and in us.

So, we rejoice in marriage as we are heirs of the grace of life. That is something no circumstance can ever take away from us. Knowing we are heirs of eternal glory goes hand in hand with knowing that God is working all things together in order to bring us to that glory. God uses marriage (and singleness) and every other circumstance of life to lead us in our pilgrimage onward to glory. We rejoice that our names are written in heaven (cf. Luke 10:20). When we remember the glorious inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus, we have every reason to rejoice evermore, even when we suffer persecution for Christ’s sake.

Rejoice, not because trials are enjoyable, but because we belong body and soul to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Rejoice that God is using our difficulties—also in our marriages as well as singleness—to lift our eyes

away from this valley of tears toward Him in whom is all our joy. Rejoice that God's love towards His people is from everlasting to everlasting.

Rejoice evermore!

And, pray without ceasing! The Holy Spirit connects rejoicing and prayer.

Prayer is an act of communing with God whereby we praise His name, confess our sins to Him, thank Him for His bountiful goodness, and ask Him to supply all our needs.

We direct our prayers to God because He alone is sovereign and able to meet our needs. According to His sovereign decree, He elected us unto an eternal inheritance before the foundations of the world. In His sovereign power, He created the heavens and the earth in order to carry out His glorious plan. He sent Jesus Christ into the world to redeem us and gather us together from north, south, east, and west. He is the sovereign God, able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (cf. Eph. 3:20).

Not only is God *able* to supply our needs, including salvation from our all our misery; He also is *willing*. Even though we are unworthy sinners, God looks upon us as we are united to Christ our Head. Since He has redeemed us with the precious blood of His only begotten Son and adopted us into His family as dear children, surely He is willing to give us all things we stand in need of.

So then, God would have us pray to Him as our Father for Christ's sake because we are needy. Needy also in our marriages. Why? Because we enter marriage as sinners. And whenever two sinners are put together, our need becomes all the more obvious. Our pride and selfishness manifest themselves when we come into contact with another proud and selfish human being. How our marriages stand in need of prayer!

That is why God would have us pray without ceasing. There is never a time when we can say, "I have no need of prayer." Every time is an appropriate time to pray. What a privilege we have to call upon God in prayer, morning, noon, and night! What a comfort to know that God hears our prayers for Christ's sake!

But prayer is also commanded. Why? Because we so easily forget to pray. We become busy in the cares

and concerns of life. We wake up five minutes before we go to work and think prayer is not really so important. Therefore, we need to hear this command, "Pray without ceasing."

To pray without ceasing is to make prayer a regular habit. What a wonderful thing when God's people set times for devotions, in which we read the Scriptures and meditate upon them, and pray, whether as individuals, as husbands and wives, or as families.

To pray without ceasing means, furthermore, to cultivate spontaneous prayers. As we go about our daily tasks we can speak short prayers to God, thanking Him for small providences, asking Him for help in time of temptations, or seeking wisdom for decisions. No true concern is too small to bring before God.

To pray without ceasing is to keep praying for the things we need. When God does not immediately grant us that for which we pray, He would have us continue in prayer like the widow who kept coming to the judge.

Prayer ought to characterize our lives.

There never is a shortage of things for which to pray. We pray for our spouses, our children, our friends, brothers and sisters in the church, and even our enemies. We pray for protection in time of persecution. More than that, we pray for every spiritual blessing Christ has earned

for us. We pray for forgiveness. We pray for grace to continue in the day-to-day battle. We pray for grace to persevere to the end. We pray that Christ would come quickly.

Especially, we pray that God would be glorified. We want Him to be glorified in all of our lives, including our marriages.

God would have us pray without ceasing.

When we see God giving us everything we need, and when we see Him answering our prayers, God would have us not only to be grateful, but also to express our gratitude: "In every thing give thanks." Give thanks for all the spiritual gifts and blessings He has given us.

Here again, the fact that the Holy Spirit commands us to give thanks shows that we often forget all His benefits. Often we do the opposite of giving thanks; we express our bitterness, anger, and frustration concerning the things God has placed upon our path. We complain, "Why has God done this to me?" But giving

That is why God would have us pray without ceasing. There is never a time when we can say, "I have no need of prayer." Every time is an appropriate time to pray. What a privilege we have to call upon God in prayer, morning, noon, and night! What a comfort to know that God hears our prayers for Christ's sake!

of thanks to God is to confess that His way is the only good way for us.

Rejoicing and prayer and thanksgiving belong together.

What does God call us to be thankful for?

Yes, we ought to give thanks for marriage (as well as singleness). We ought to give thanks for physical provision and the comforts of life.

But especially, give thanks for all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. Give thanks for spiritual life. Give thanks for faith and forgiveness. Give thanks for daily spiritual supplies and the sure hope of heaven. Give thanks whenever and wherever God is glorified. There is so much for which we can be thankful.

Notice that the inspired apostle commands us to give thanks “in every thing.” Our tendency is to give thanks only for certain things: a loving spouse, health, strength,

food, shelter, prosperity, success, and such like things. But, we find it hard to give thanks for trials: a difficult spouse, loneliness, sickness, and disappointments. We find it hard to thank God for His fatherly chastisements. But God tells us to give thanks in everything.

“In every thing give thanks” exactly because God is using “every thing” to bring us good.

“This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning” us. This is what God has ordained for us who are in Christ Jesus. This is part of that good, perfect, and acceptable will of God that is well pleasing in His sight.

United to Christ, we have every reason to rejoice evermore. United to Him, we have every reason to pray without ceasing and know that our prayers are heard. United to Him, we have every reason to be thankful and express our thanks to God. Rejoice, pray, and give thanks; evermore, without ceasing, and in every thing.



Editor's notes

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Editors' notes on the *Standard Bearer* for 2018-19

This issue marks the beginning of the new volume (number 95) for the *Standard Bearer*, first printed in October of 1924. These “notes” will give readers a small preview of the coming year in the *Standard Bearer*.

Dordrecht, 1618-19

This volume year corresponds perfectly with the years of the “Great Synod”—the synod of Dordrecht held 400 years ago. God used this international gathering to reject Arminianism thoroughly and marvelously to uphold the doctrines of sovereign grace. Since the *Standard Bearer* is devoted to the Reformed truth, we are delighted to be able to join in the commemoration of Dordt. Prof. D. Kuiper will be giving brief historical sketches on the Synod, which have already begun to appear in the *SB*. Also, two special issues are planned. The Reformation issue (planned for Nov. 1) will emphasize the doctrine defended and maintained in the Canons of Dordt. In

the Spring, a second issue is planned on “The Other Work of the Great Synod.”

Other changes in this volume year include the following:

Rubric switching

Rev. Richard Smit, having returned to mission work in the Philippines, will be moving from “When Thou Sittest in Thine House” to “Go Ye into All the World.” Rev. Brian Huizinga is completing his series in “Strength of Youth” and will be joining Prof. Ronald Cammenga in “Taking Heed to Doctrine.” Rev. James Laning has ended his writing in that rubric and will be concentrating exclusively on “God’s Wonderful Works.”

Time off

Rev. Eric Guichelaar has asked for release from his writing in “All Around Us.” We reluctantly agreed,

thanking him for his work in the last volume, and hoping he will soon be able to return to writing for the *SB*.

Joining

We welcome two new writers to the staff. Rev. Dan Holstege, missionary in the Philippines, will be writing in “Go Ye into All the World.” And Rev. Ryan Barnhill will begin composing for “Strength of Youth.”

Farewell

We bid farewell to a long-time contributor to the *SB*. Rev. Rodney Miersma has decided to end his writing service to this magazine after 46 years. His first contribution appeared in August of 1971 when he was but a candidate for the ministry. In those years, one of the graduates of the Protestant Reformed Seminary gave a speech at graduation. Being the only graduate,

the task fell to him. He addressed the audience gathered in Edgerton PRC (his home congregation) on the topic “The Minister and the Church Order,” which was soon printed in the *SB*. Rev. Miersma concluded in January of 2017 with the meditation “Running into the Strong Tower.” We thank the brother for his many articles through the years, as well as continuing to contribute to the *SB* long after his emeritation.

Finally, to all the staff, thank you for your dedication to the work. The great majority of the staff will continue to fill the pages with meaningful, Reformed teaching. To all our readers, thank you for your support in this effort. We are amazed at God’s goodness for allowing us to continue the publication of this Reformed magazine, and humbled that God uses us as weak means to promote and defend His truth. May God keep us faithful.



Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

What must I do...?

With this issue of the *SB* we begin a new volume year.

For the Reformed church world, what looms large this year, spilling into the first part of 2019, is the 400th anniversary of the Great Synod of Dordt and its magisterial document, the Canons of Dordrecht.

Although our good brother, Prof. Douglas Kuiper, has been ‘commissioned’ to contribute on a regular basis over the next year brief articles dealing with the history and main activities of the Great Synod, we would be remiss if, in this opening editorial of the new volume year, we did not deal with some issue relating to the Canons and the controversy that led to Dordt.

Hence, the article that follows.

The November 1 issue of the *SB* will be devoted to articles examining the content of the Canons themselves, examining each of the five heads of doctrine that have come to be known as the “Five Points of Calvinism” (TULIP), articles focusing on the central truth(s) set forth by each head. I have been assigned the fourth head of doctrine, the section that deals with the doctrine of “irresistible grace” (and its fruits).

In this editorial we want to touch on a few things that are related to the doctrine of irresistible grace. I fear that we tend to underestimate that truth and its implications, which really is to say, what *He, the Holy Spirit*, is able to make of a man. We give you exhibit A, Simon Peter—the boastful, self-confident disciple pre-cross, in contrast to the humble, courageous apostle post-Pentecost. When it comes to a believer, the difference could not be more remarkable.

We must not underestimate what by virtue of the operations of the Spirit a man becomes, and what the Spirit of grace enables a man to do!

Because there are so many truths and issues that stand related to Head IV of the Canons, we do not fear leaving ourselves with little to deal with in the special issue.

What we touch on in this editorial are issues that are not only relevant to a proper understanding of the Canons and of the historically defined Reformed faith, but to issues being discussed in the PRC of late, namely, grace and godliness—the life of good works—in the

life of the child of God; in particular, how the life of godliness relates to grace, and to faith, and then to the preaching of the gospel itself with its call to faith and godliness.

And note that last phrase—the call to faith *and* godliness. Such is important when it comes to defining the call of the gospel—a being called not simply to “a” faith, to “a” believing, but to that faith that tendeth to godliness. For this reason Christ warned those who expressed a desire to follow Him that, if that was their desire, they must be ready to count the cost—starting with a willingness to part ways with this present world.

This is no small matter when it comes to true faith. Ask Demas, that young zealot who made an original profession of faith, evidently even aspiring to the gospel ministry, but who, in the end, parted ways with Paul and the Christian faith.

Why? Having loved this present world! (II Tim. 4:10).

The way of godliness did not appeal to Demas in the end. He was numbered with those who in the parable of the sower had a ‘faith’ and made a confession that in time was choked with the cares of this life. (Cf. Canons, III/IV.9.)

The Canons have something to say to the vital issues mentioned above.

When reading the Canons, it must be kept in mind that they were written in response to the Arminians, not only over against their heretical doctrines that ‘degraded’ salvation all of grace, but also with an eye to the *accusations* that the Arminians lodged against the Reformed and their Calvinistic doctrines of grace.

One of the chief accusations, if not the very chief, was the allegation that Calvinism with its ‘hyper-emphasis’ on “salvation is all of God and all of grace” simply turns mankind into ‘senseless stocks and blocks.’ (Cf. Heads III/IV, Art. 16.)

An allegation still heard today.

The Canons’ figurative reference is to a tree stump or a block of wood. An appropriate figure would be the ancient printing presses in which the printer put all the wooden block letters in place and then turned the handle of the press, pressing the ink-covered letters onto a page and leaving words behind, a process in which the passive paper played no active role at all. It simply displayed the ink of the letters pressed into it by the printer’s will and determination.

So, charged the Arminians, it is with the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation and man, the human being simply turned into a passive, receptive page, in whom the sovereign grace these high Calvinists keep prating about does it all. The saved human beings of such theology are simply receptacles who have no active involvement in

responding favorably to gospel preaching, really not even needing to respond willingly. God, the great (Im)printer, does it all.

A figure more up-to-date would be that of a computer screen with its keyboard. The Arminians alleging “You hyper-Reformed have turned believing man into nothing but a computer screen on which a man’s spiritual words and actions appear as God pushes the keys and types the commands. Thoughts and desires that one can call his own have nothing to do with it because that would mean man has contributed something. Rather, the spiritual activities expressed by one are simply things that God and the Spirit have imprinted, typed into us for others to see.”

Nothing but “stocks and blocks”!

Is this indeed what salvation by sovereign, irresistible grace teaches or implies?

It is true that, when it comes to things spiritual, there is that which one is *called* to do, indeed, is *required* to do. But is it altogether improper for preachers so much as to suggest that there is that which one *can* do (is able to do)? And then, in the end, to go so far as to declare that if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do? Surely, that is altogether unbiblical and unreformed, it is sometimes argued.

Such, the Arminians alleged, was the logical conclusion of the “hyper-Reformed.”

This allegation the Canons reject and condemn.

No, not when those of whom you are speaking are the ungodly and unregenerate. Then, it is true there is that to which every fallen sinner is *called* to do, namely, to repent and believe, but which he *cannot* do.

But when those of whom one is speaking are the born-again, that is, regenerated, living children of God, that is another matter entirely. Then there is not only that which one is *called* to do, but also that which one *can* do as well.

The Canons make this plain when they speak of a marvelous, incomprehensible grace by which the elect “...are enabled to believe with the heart, and love their Savior” (III/IV, Art. 13).¹

Enabled!

By whom?

By whom but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of irresistible grace! This Holy Spirit breaths into a man a life-giving

¹ The word “enabled” is not found in the original. The phrase could better be translated “...by this grace of God they believe with the heart and love their Savior.” Nonetheless, the truth of the statement is set forth in the immediately preceding article (12) which concludes with the words “Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received.”

power that transforms, a power called ‘grace’ because it is so completely contrary to what any sinful man or woman deserves. There is a newness that results, called newness of life, spiritual life, a life out of which there will proceed spiritual activities of faith and obedience.

In Article 11 of this 4th Head, the Canons describe what this wonder-work of the Spirit accomplishes. Having spoken of the “efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit” acting upon the heart of man, the Canons declare that the Spirit “...infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.”

Good actions! Namely, faith (actively believing) and godliness (the life of good works).

The question is, what does the Spirit use to bring forth these spiritual actions or activities?

What the Canons wanted no part of was the notion that these spiritual actions are automatically present and produced where grace has worked, provided by God in such a way that the child of God has nothing to do with actually believing or walking in godliness. The Spirit of Christ who has begun this work in him is really the One who now does this work through him, simply providing for one what he cannot do himself. And this is to be insisted on because only then does all the glory go to God. Anything else would be giving credit to man.

This was exactly what the Arminians claimed consistent Calvinism really comes down to.

And this was exactly what the Calvinists of Dordt were adamant in refuting. This was a wicked caricature, not true Calvinism.

Not that there have not been Calvinists of a certain stripe that have taught such a view. But this is not the Calvinism of the Canons, God be thanked!

It is exactly to refute this allegation that the Canons in Head IV emphasize the centrality of the preaching of the gospel with its call to repent and to believe, the gospel set forth as a means of grace.

That the writers of the Canons insisted that the gospel preached was a necessary means of grace (cf. the opening sentence of Art. 17) means they confessed and taught that if a man with his household was to be saved

and consciously enter into the kingdom, placing himself with his family under the rule of Christ as his Lord and Savior, he was called, he was required, to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—“Repent and believe, that thou mightiest be saved with thy house.”

Covenantal salvation is to be found in no other way.

Yielding to the gospel call, a man becomes active in believing what the gospel declares. To the call of Christ “Come unto me,” there is the response “Lord, I come.”

One might piously respond, “But that is impossible for sinful man.”

To which we reply, if the reference is to one unregenerate, yes, to be sure, impossible!

But if to a sinner regenerated and indwelt by the life-giving Spirit, then such obedience is not only possible, but that which actually occurs. The heart has been renewed and one’s will set free to respond positively to the gospel summons.

This must be maintained if one will do justice to the record of the apostolic Scriptures.

On Pentecost, following Peter’s sermon concerning Jesus crucified and risen as the scripturally prophesied Messiah, a multitude besought the apostles, asking “Men and brethren, what must *we do*?” To which Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...” (Acts 2:37,38)

The Philippian jailor cried out “Sirs, what must *I do* to be saved?” To which Paul responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” (Acts 16:30, 31).

There was something they were called *to do*. And they did it.

Of themselves, apart from grace? No! But they themselves did do it—they repented and believed. Grace enabled them to do it. Or more

correctly, God the Holy Spirit graciously enabled them to do it. But do it they did in the obedience of faith to the call, to the summons of the gospel. And in so doing, God was praised and grace glorified. God the Holy Spirit has made out of sinners new creatures indeed.

And the same thing holds true when it comes to godliness—walking in the way of good works.

The emphasis of Head IV of the Canons is not upon godliness as such, but rather upon the connection between grace and faith. But neither is the call to godliness (the life of good works) absent. As pointed out

There was something they were called to do. And they did it. Of themselves, apart from grace? No! But they themselves did do it—they repented and believed. Grace enabled them to do it. Or more correctly, God the Holy Spirit graciously enabled them to do it... And in so doing, God was praised and grace glorified.

above, the Canons speak of a grace that brings forth “the fruits of good actions.”

And in Article 16 of Head IV the Canons speak of “...a ready and sincere spiritual obedience [that] begins to reign.”

There is a godly walk to which the regenerated child of God is called, and godly actions (deeds) that believers perform, fruits of grace and evidences of what the Heidelberg Catechism calls “*true conversion*”.

To such good works the regenerated child of God is not only called, but such he is also able to do as evidences of and proof of the grace and faith he claims to have.

The elect child of God is not, as one blatant species of Antinomian taught, saved like a piece of dead meat found in the city dump, tied to the bumper of a garbage truck, and dragged to heaven against his will, resisting all the way.

The newness of life worked by the Holy Spirit begins to show itself already in this life. And under the call of the gospel will and must show itself. As Article 17 declares, “For grace is conferred by admonitions.”

The Holy Spirit is not so powerless that even He in the life of a saved sinner can make no headway against the current of the depravity of sin that remains. Rather, His irresistible grace transforms and works true conversion indeed.

This is important for Christ’s church to understand as she labors with her members, members who as sinners have perhaps backslidden and come under power of who knows what addictions—that of alcohol and drink, that of pornography, or of gambling, and more.

The sinning member despairs, informing his elders, “I am snared, I am depraved, there is nothing I can do!”

To which the elders respond, “There is nothing you

can do? Of yourself, to be sure, nothing. But you claim to be a believer confessing Christ? Then there is not only that which you are *called* to do, but which you *can* do—repent, turn from this sin, and walk as a child of the light.”

This is the power that grace confers on a sinner who is seeking grace and help in time of need.

When it comes to faith, to repentance, and to walking in the ways of godliness, these are not things that we ourselves can *produce*. They are the product of the life worked by the Holy Spirit. But having been recreated in the image of God, God’s children are enabled *to do* these things.

And under the admonitions and exhortations of the law and gospel preached, they come to active expression.

The doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace does not turn the hearers of the gospel into “senseless stocks and blocks.” This the Canons make plain. That is not Calvinism.

But neither does it mean that when it comes to the call to repent and believe and to “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance,” there is really nothing we as the redeemed can do.

To claim such is the case, be it ever so piously motivated, is to display a profound misunderstanding of the wonder of grace, grace that profoundly transforms. Such is to minimize the work of the Holy Spirit who breaths life, Christ’s life, and who is able to bring out of a corrupt stock a people recreated to be “zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

The God of saving grace is magnified when it is seen what His Holy Spirit can make of a man, namely, one who hears, obeys, arises, and takes up his bed, walking in God’s ways (cf. Mark 2:11, 12).

Letters

Discussion of synodical decisions

The final paragraph of the editorial, July 2018, urges readers, who are members of the PRC, to study the decisions of the PRC Synod of 2018, and are further enjoined to strive to understand the relationship of faith and good works. The editorial affirms and I believe that it is unquestionably true *that the work of Christ in our salvation has eternal and everlasting importance and is by the mercy and grace of Christ alone. There is*

only one way to the Father. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me,” speaks Christ (John 14:6).

Regarding the suggested study of the decision of the PRC Synod of 2018, the editor concludes that thought and discussion regarding the experience of the Christian’s covenant fellowship with God is obligatory and judicious, because the connection of faith and works is a crucial facet of the *settlement of this principal issue by our PRC Synod*. The editor’s proposal is required

because the recommendation for the study of the relation between faith and works, in this instance, is needed due to the PRC Synod's decision regarding protests about the orthodoxy of a PRC minister's sermons.

I read the editor as declaring that a PRC reader's reflection or saying something about the decision of Synod will result in questioning the decision of Synod and in this way will be committing the sin of *slander*, a dreadfully serious sin. Slander is sin against the 9th commandment and is punishable by law. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice..." (Eph. 4:31). The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of *slander* as "one of the proper works of the devil," who is the chief slanderer. Slander brings upon the child of God the heavy wrath of God.

Notice please! A minister is being examined by the synod for doctrinal error in his preaching. The PRC Synod has resolved that his preaching is orthodox but is at best in many ways and frequently quasi-orthodox.

—If one disagrees or speaks against the resolution of the PRC Synod, one of the broader bodies of Reformed churches, one commits the sin of *slander*?

—Candid and careful consideration of the synodical decision is *slander*?

—Is there not a requisite and essential time for sanctified debate and difference of opinion among PRC believing Christians?

"He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander [utters a slander] is a fool" (Prov. 10:18).

Agatha Lubbers
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Response:

I appreciate the thoughtful questions you send because they raise some issues that are not always understood and about which discussion can be profitable.

The overarching issue, first of all, is the binding character of ecclesiastical decisions. As you are aware, the Church Order binds all members to certain rules of conduct in the church. Article 31 instructs us: "...whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order..."

The force of Article 31 is that all members are required to submit to decisions taken by the ecclesiastical body. After a decision is made, if a member believes that he is able to prove (using the Bible, the confessions, and/or the Church Order) that the decision is wrong,

he may attempt to do so. If he convinces the body, the decision is overturned. If he does not convince the body, he must submit to the decision. He is not free to go about declaring his opposition to it. One might—in his own mind—disagree with a decision of synod; his conscience is free to disagree. But he is not free to speak against the decision.

But your questions have to do with discussions of synodical decisions soon after they are made and when one is not sure whether or not he agrees with the decisions. The second question, regarding a "candid and careful consideration of the synodical decision," asks, "Is there not a requisite and essential time for sanctified debate and difference of opinion among PRC believing Christians?"

My response is: There *must* be room for this. Members must be able to discuss decisions of ecclesiastical bodies and even debate the issues. As the editorial concluded: "Good discussions of this material will be rewarding. It will result in a better understanding of the place of Christ in our salvation—His saving work for us and in us. And that in turn will lead to even more appreciation for God's gift of His only begotten Son for our salvation."

And yet, one surely recognizes that both wisdom and proper motivation are important in such discussions. What is the motivation in the discussion? Is a member debating a matter with friends because he is not convinced by synod's grounds and is testing his own arguments to discover whether he is seeing the issues correctly? Then the motivation is to seek knowledge and understanding. This is healthy and good for the church, if done wisely. Wisdom makes one to know whether this setting is proper and all the people in this group are good for such a discussion. For example, it is not wise to raise such questions in the presence of someone who is always critical of ecclesiastical decisions. Nor is it wise to raise it with new members or with those who are not members of the PRC, or simply to blurt out disagreement in the narthex of church and let everyone nearby hear the discussion. But done wisely, with responsible, thinking fellow members, it can be, as you suggest, good and helpful.

But, on the other hand, is a member fully convinced that synod is wrong and is trying to convince others of the same so they will join his cause? In this case he is promoting opposition to a settled and binding decision. This is schismatic.

Wisdom and motivation. Those discussing synodical decisions must exercise wisdom and must examine their motives.

For all that, please note that, in the particular point

made in the original article, I maintain only that to accuse someone of heresy¹ when the synod, in its condemnation of the teaching in question, pointedly refrained from calling it heresy, is slander of that individual. Discuss the doctrine. Debate the issues (in wisdom and with proper motivation). But do not slander members or officebearers in good standing in the churches.

Salvation and good works

I found much in the July 2018 editorial on Synod 2018 encouraging, though I would like to voice some concerns.

First, Prof. Dykstra uses phrases such as “works are excluded in salvation,” yet the Scriptures at times say that our good works do play an important role in our “salvation” (for example, I Tim. 2:15; I Tim. 4:16). Some Reformed creeds explicitly state we cannot be “saved” without “good works” (for example, Tetrapolitan Confession, Chapter 5: “We utterly deny that any one can be saved unless by Christ’s Spirit he be brought this far, that there be in him no lack of good works, for which God created him”; and Waldensian Confession 1662, Conclusion: “We are usually [wrongly] accused of believing that...good works are not necessary for salvation”). Of course, these verses and creeds are using “salvation” in a broad sense to include, for example, sanctification, so they in no way deny justification by faith alone, while presumably the professor is using the word in the narrow sense of “justification.” It seems to me that the present controversy is better served by using creedal, technical words such as “justification” (Belgic Confession, Arts. 23-24) and “righteousness” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 61-62) where possible, instead of non-technical and ambiguous words such as “salvation,” which have a broad range of meanings and can easily lead to misunderstandings. Perhaps some of the present controversial statements are only unorthodox if words such as “salvation” are assumed to be meant in the narrow sense of “justification.”

Second, the brother quotes synod as saying, “Necessarily, then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant...and justification by faith alone are compromised.” If synod judges the minister’s statements as compromising the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone, why would they not be heretical? Synod declared the statements to be “out of harmony with the Reformed confessions”—is that not, by definition, declaring the statements heretical? And if such compromising statements are not heretical, why is the minister who made

them subject to a theological examination to determine his “understanding and convictions,” something perhaps unprecedented in the history of the PRC, and despite the minister already having submitted a written response which Synod 2018 judged “orthodox”?

Third, why does Prof. Dykstra place before the reader the threat of deposition and even excommunication? Was this threat of excommunication made officially by synod or is it the personal viewpoint of the editor of the *SB*? While I would certainly want to avoid the sin of slander, especially against an officebearer, the officebearer in question is awaiting his theological examination, so that there is uncertainty and ambiguity about his teaching.

Manuel Kuhs,

Member of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship,
Republic of Ireland

Response:

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on the July editorial on the Synod of the PRC. I will try to answer your concerns.

First, your letter states that “Prof. Dykstra uses such phrases as ‘works are excluded in salvation’...” While it is true that the quoted phrase was used, it was immediately explained in the rest of the sentence which was not quoted. There it becomes plain that works in salvation *as such*, that is to say *as fruit*, are *not* excluded. The full sentence reads: “Works have no place in salvation in the sense that works contribute to, earn, or merit salvation.” And the rest of the paragraph gives further explanation:

Further, works are not an instrument to obtaining salvation or the blessing of salvation. Rather salvation is all of grace. All of salvation is in the crucified Christ. Salvation’s benefits flow to the believer through the bond of faith, for faith appropriates Christ with all His benefits. Works are but fruits of thankfulness.

As to the necessity of good works in the life of a believer, Synod 2018 affirmed this necessity, as the editorial pointed out: “Is it not true that good works are required of believers in the covenant? They certainly are. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches this in question 86....” And again, “So, can it be concluded that good works are necessary in the covenant? Yes, for God requires them.”

As an aside, the quotations in your letter are from *Protestant* confessions, containing much Reformed doctrine, but you recognize that they are not explicitly *Reformed* confessions. At any rate, those isolated state-

¹ See the response to the next letter for a discussion of what is heresy.

ments cannot be understood apart from these creeds' strong affirmation of the truth that our good works are the fruit of God's saving work in us. The Tetrapolitan teaches that good works are "ascribed to none other, than to this one only Spirit." And the Waldensian creed states that "...those who are united to [Jesus Christ] by a living faith ought to and really do give themselves to good works" (Art. 20). And when Article 21 speaks of the necessity of good works, it gives as the reason "since God prepared them so that we walk in them." That reminds the Reformed believer of how the Heidelberg Catechism starts the answer to question 86, "why must we still do good works?" "Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit, after His own image; that so we may testify...."

You also express concerns with Synod's language that the erroneous statements "compromised" the doctrines of the unconditional covenant and justification by faith, and are "out of harmony with the Reformed confessions." You wonder how synod can declare these things about the minister's statements, and yet these statements not be considered heretical. Brother, you have expressed in writing what many have asked me personally, so I am thankful for the opportunity to clarify.

First, concerning heresy, understand that there is no official Reformed definition of heresy. However, in their *Church Order Commentary* on Article 80, Van Dellen and Monsma give a description of heresy that contains the generally recognized elements. They write:

When one deviates from one or more of the fundamental teachings of Holy Writ, as expressed in the confessional standards of the Churches, and that consciously and purposefully, he is guilty of...heresy.

They go on to distinguish heresy from other teachings to which someone might object.

The Church Order does not refer to variations from genuinely accepted teachings but which are not definitely expressed in our confessional writings. Neither does Article 80 refer to slight variations regarding subordinate truths. Nor is it the implication that one who unintentionally, through the use of a wrong term or otherwise, states a matter erroneously, thereby makes

himself worthy of discipline. The deviation must be conscious and deliberate.

The key point is that heresy is a deliberate deviation from or contradiction of fundamental teachings of Scripture as expressed in the confessions.

In that light, then, synod spoke not of heresy—teaching that directly contradicted the confessions, or teaching that clearly deviated from the confessions. Rather, synod spoke of certain doctrines being "compromised." The word "compromise" can have various shades of meaning. The sense that best captures it here, I believe, is "injure." Perhaps an illustration is in order. One can speak of a human body's immune system being compromised by a virus. One can speak of a virus compromising the security of a computer. Something is present that ought not be. Something needs to be stopped. If it is not, it will do serious damage to the entire system—take over the body's immune system, or, permanently shut down the computer. This is a serious matter.

So likewise, the teaching which Synod 2018 rejected compromised other doctrines and had to be

stopped. If the teaching went farther and the logical conclusions were completely drawn out, it would eventually contradict these doctrines as set forth in the confessions. As such, the statements were injuring these important truths—creating confusion or contradictions regarding the place and function of works in justification and the covenant. Nevertheless, the statements did not explicitly contradict the confessions. Partly this is due to the fact that these were statements on matters that the confessions had not spelled out. So, to use synod's language, while the statements did not contradict the confessions, they were not "in harmony" with the confessions' teaching on the place and function of good works.

Finally, as to the warning issued at the end of the editorial, it was my own. Since the time that the editorial appeared, synod approved Rev. Overway's Formula of Subscription examination. However, the warning had nothing to do with his examination. My warning was about the teaching itself and the fact that synod, in its condemnation, did not declare it to be heresy. For that reason, members of the PRC may not declare it to be heretical.

As to the necessity of good works in the life of a believer, Synod 2018 affirmed this necessity, as the editorial pointed out: "Is it not true that good works are required of believers in the covenant? They certainly are. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches this in question 86...." And again, "So, can it be concluded that good works are necessary in the covenant? Yes, for God requires them."



Dordt 400: Memorial stones

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, newly appointed professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

The Synod of Dordt (3) The States General

...These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.—Joshua 4:7c

Of the 104 men delegated to the Synod of Dordt (see last article in the Sept. 1 issue), 18 represented the Dutch national government, known as the States General.

Why were they there?

The Reformed church in the Netherlands was supervised and supported by the national government. Without the government's permission, no national synod could meet. Only three national synods had been held previously (at Dordt in 1578; Middelburg, 1581; and 's Gravenhage, 1586). It would be *thirty-two years* before the government permitted the fourth national synod. In 1607 the States General had refused an initial request to call a national synod to settle the Arminian controversy. And it would never permit another: the fifth national synod would meet in 1816, after the Dutch Republic ended in 1795. Government approval did not come easily.

When the States General finally did authorize the convening of the synod at Dordt, it also promised to finance it, budgeting 100,000 guilders. This was an *enormous* sum in a time when a laborer made 300 guilders a year and a pastor made 500 guilders a year.¹ Reading the minutes, and understanding how long the synod lasted, one is not surprised to read that "In practice this amount was exceeded by far."²

Having authorized the synod and promised to pay for it, the States General desired some involvement in the synod's work. So it sent eighteen lay deputies as its representatives.

What did they do?

In a letter dated November 16, 1618, the States General specifically mandated its deputies, among other things, to

- 1) examine the credentials of the international delegates;
- 2) ensure that the synod treated only the ecclesiastical

matters that it was authorized to treat and did not interfere with any aspect of national or provincial government;

- 3) ensure that the synod was conducted in an orderly way;
- 4) see to it that all decisions and reports of synod were headed by this phrase, "The National Synod holden [held] under the authority of their high Mightinesses the States-General at Dort";
- 5) write and maintain their own copy of the decisions of synod; and
- 6) oversee the synod's finances and pay its bills.

The deputies corresponded often with the national government regarding the progress of the synod. Occasionally they received instructions from the States General about what concerns they should address to the synod.

In giving advice to the synod, these deputies could speak only as a body, not as individuals. Before addressing the synod, they had to consult together and come to a formal agreement regarding their advice. For this reason they had their own president (actually, the presidency rotated among the deputies weekly), secretary, and minutes.³

This all seems cumbersome and intrusive to us. We can be thankful that our political entities do not insist on being present at and involved in making the decisions of our classes and synods. However, in God's providence, the presence of the state deputies hurt the cause of the Remonstrants and helped the Reformed cause. Perhaps in another article I can develop this thought further.



Daniel Heinsius (1580-1655) was librarian and professor of Greek at Leiden University. At the Synod of Dordt he served as the secretary of the deputies of the States General.

1 <http://vanosnabrugge.org/docs/dutchmoney.htm>, accessed August 30, 2018.

2 Fred van Lieburg, *The Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619*, transl. Dick Swier (Dordrecht: Stichting Historisch Platform Dordrecht, 2017), 19.

3 Johanna Roelevink, "Introduction to the Acts and the Instructions of the Delegates of the States General," *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae* (1618-1619), ed. Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015) 1:LIII-LXI.



Strength of youth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa

Be strong

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2018, p. 307.

Strength

When you think about what it means to be a mature man, one of the things that probably comes to mind is his strength. Generally speaking, men are physically stronger than women. If the woman is the “weaker vessel” (I Pet. 3:7), this implies that the man is the stronger vessel.

Especially is it the case with young men that they are characterized by strength. When I was a teenager, it was not uncommon for me to work all day in the scorching heat of the summer and, then, after work spend the entire evening running up and down the basketball court. The point is not to make you think that I was so strong (I was not), but rather to illustrate the point that young men in general are strong.

The Bible speaks of young men in the same way. Proverbs 20:29 says, “The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.” We read in I John 2:14, “...I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong...” And in Isaiah 40:30, when it describes our dependence upon Almighty God, it speaks of young men as the epitome of earthly strength: “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.”

But when the Bible speaks of the strength of youth, it does not have in mind merely muscles. After all, God “taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man” (Ps. 147:10, a verse oft repeated to a sports-crazed young man by a wise grandmother).

Rather, the Word of God has in mind *spiritual* strength. This is evident from the rest of I John 2:14 when it says to young men, “... because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” What ought to characterize mature Christian men, and young men in particular, is that they are strong spiritually.

But what does this mean? What is spiritual strength?

There are probably many different ways of describing this strength. You could say that it is a close walk with God, the fear of the Lord, wisdom, godliness, and so on.

But what I want to look at here is that the strength of a mature man is *his faith*. The spiritually weak man is weak in faith, and the spiritually strong man is strong in faith.

This idea is biblical. In Isaiah 30:15 God reminds the people of Judah, “in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” Ephesians 6:10 says, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” Then, in the following inventory of the Christian armor, the Holy Spirit says, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Significantly, I John 5:4 says, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

As many of you have learned in catechism, faith is fundamentally a bond that unites us to Christ. Christ is the living Vine. In Him alone there flows the “sap” of everlasting life and the blessings of salvation. By nature we are dead branches, unconnected to the Vine, fit for the fire. As the gracious Husbandman, our heavenly Father takes His elect but spiritual dead branches and engrafts them into the Vine. The “graft” that unites us to Christ is the bond of faith.

This reminds us immediately that our strength as men is found in Christ alone. In ourselves we are weak and impotent. Apart from Christ we young men “faint” and are “weary” and “utterly fall” (Is. 40:30). Our strength is found alone in the sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords. Our victory, our overcoming of the wicked one and the world, is in His cross and empty tomb.

In giving us the gift of faith and uniting us by that unbreakable bond to Christ, God also makes us alive and active. With the life-giving “sap” of the Vine flowing through us, our faith becomes active, something that we exercise.

As the Heidelberg Catechism so helpfully explains, the faith of the child of God has two important aspects. The first is that faith is a “certain knowledge.” Faith is knowledge, the comprehension of certain facts. It is

the knowledge that there is a God in heaven who alone must be worshiped. It is the knowledge that this God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things visible and invisible. It is the knowledge of the Fall, the curse, and sin. It is the knowledge of Christ as the only Savior who by His death on the cross atoned for the sins of His elect church. It is the knowledge that this Christ is now Lord over all, and that He is coming again to judge the world. It is the knowledge of all that God has promised us in His Word.

Faith is a *certain* knowledge. Far from being merely intellectual head-knowledge, this is personal heart-knowledge. The one true God is *my* God and Father. The Fall of Adam and Eve was *my* sin. Jesus Christ is *my* Savior and Lord. He is coming again to judge *me* and bring *me* to glory. This is not abstract, but personal. Not coldly academic, but heart-warming.

If the strength of youth is faith, then one who is spiritually strong is one who possesses this certain knowledge and delights in it.

The second aspect of faith mentioned in the Heidelberg Catechism is an “assured confidence,” or, as others have translated it, a “hearty trust.” Whenever the Bible speaks of our trusting in the Lord, it is speaking of this aspect of faith. Knowing Christ as our Savior, we look to Him, rest in Him, embrace Him, and depend upon Him alone.

This aspect of our faith, the hearty trust, rests upon the first, the certain knowledge. Why do you trust your parents? Because of your knowledge of their love and care for you. Why do you trust that friend? Because of your knowledge of his faithfulness and her confidentiality. Why do we trust in Christ? Because of our knowledge of Him as revealed in the Bible and also our knowledge of His love and faithfulness in our own lives.

It seems almost paradoxical, but the reality is that spiritual strength is found in acknowledging that you are weak. The proud man, the one who imagines himself to be strong, falls. The humble man, the one who knows he is weak and depends entirely on Christ for strength, stands. “When I am weak, then am I strong” (II Cor. 12:10).

If the strength of youth is faith, then one who is spiritually strong is one who possesses this hearty trust in and dependence upon Christ.

And this is strength! By faith in Christ we are strong to withstand the fiery darts of the devil. By faith in Christ we are strong to overcome the world and its pressures. By faith in Christ we are strong to wage war against our old man of sin. By faith in Christ we are able to bear up under heavy burdens. By faith in Christ we are able to carry out our callings in life. By faith in

Christ we are able to be strong and courageous leaders.

Young men, you are strong! Because you have received the gift of faith!

Strengthened

Since every son of God has received the gift of faith, every young man is strong. And yet there are varying degrees of strength. Some might be weaker in faith, while others are stronger in faith. In our own lifetime we might have times of weaker faith and times of stronger faith.

Understanding this, we ought to be striving to grow in our faith. Just as a world-class athlete spends his life honing his skills and building his muscles, so the mature man will spend his life strengthening his spiritual muscles and growing in faith.

God has provided us with different means (tools or instruments) by which our faith grows. Not only does He graciously give us faith, but in His grace He also provides us with the means by which He makes our faith to be strengthened and nourished.

The chief means by which God strengthens our faith is the preaching of the gospel. Not only does the preaching provide instruction in various doctrines and in the Christian life, but in all this it points us always to Christ and to His saving work on the cross. Through such faithful preaching, the Holy Spirit works to strengthen us both in the certain knowledge and the hearty trust of our faith.

A secondary means of faith is the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. As earthly pictures of spiritual realities, the sacraments serve to further confirm and assure us of what we have heard in the preaching.

The means of the preaching of the sacraments are found in the local, instituted church. This means that the wise young men will value membership in the church and attendance at the worship services of the church. His attitude is not that Sunday is a bore, but rather that the Sabbath is a great delight. He rejoices in the means God provides on the Sabbath in the church to strengthen his faith.

In addition to these two chief means of faith, there are many other means that the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen our faith. The means of grace include prayer, singing, personal and family devotions, good reading, meditating, memorizing Scripture, catechism, Bible study, visiting the shut-ins and widows and widowers, the instruction of parents, and the communion of the saints. From a certain point of view, all things are a means of grace for the believer. This includes trials. Even though they are so difficult, trials greatly strengthen our faith.

In one way or another, all of these things drive us to

and focus our attention upon the Word. It is chiefly by the Word of God that we have our faith strengthened. Psalm 119:9 asks, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” I John 2:14 says, “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you.” There is no substitute for time spent in the Word for producing spiritually strong men.

That forces us to examine ourselves: “How much time do we actually spend using these means to grow in our faith?” Perhaps start here: “How much time do I spend going to the gym and working out to get physically ripped? How many hours have I spent practicing my jump shot or perfecting my golf swing? How long do I spend fine-tuning my car or playing video games?”

If we spend so much time focusing on physical strength, should we not spend at least an equal amount of time on gaining spiritual strength? If we devote so much energy to what is of limited value, should we not devote at least a proportionate amount of energy to what is of greater, lasting value?

Young men, you are strong! And continue to grow in strength!

Strong!

This is not the kind of strength that the world tries to promote. They think that strength means being

physically strong and attractive, having a successful career and making lots of money, driving a certain vehicle, and having beautiful women fawn over you.

That is not the strength of which God’s Word speaks. Strong men are spiritually strong, strong in God’s Word, and strong to fight against the enemies of the church.

The church needs single men that are strong and wise. The church needs husbands that are strong leaders for their wives. The church needs strong fathers who instruct and rear the covenant seed faithfully. The church needs strong members who know and love God’s Word. The church needs faithful officebearers who are strong and wise and love the church.

Young men, if you take stock of your congregation, you will probably see that there is an old, wise generation of strong men that has served their families and church faithfully for many years. But they are reaching the end of their earthly pilgrimage. The church needs another generation of men to arise in these dark days, to grow into spiritual fathers and take up their place in the church.

This is what the church needs! This is what the church has always needed, but in these dark days in which we live this is something that the church needs even more than ever before! The church needs strong young men! And the church needs these strong young men to mature into wise older men.

Young men, you are strong! Be strong!



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud, science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan

Radioactive dating

Amid sediment in an oxbow of the ever-changing curves of the Red River, a well-preserved collection of items has been found. Among the items is a leather belt and buckle, reminiscent of the ones worn by those who traversed the Northwest transporting furs during the great North American fur trade of the 1700s. Could this belt have belonged to those fur traders, whose travels helped explore and settle Western Canada?

In the late 1940s, Willard Libby, using his knowledge of radioactive decay, labored to develop a method to calculate the age of once-living organisms—creatures that contained carbon, or what is called organic ma-

terial. This method, known as radiocarbon dating or carbon-14 (¹⁴C) dating, uses the rate at which ¹⁴C radioactively decays to determine the age of artifacts.

Understanding how radioactive dating works is important to Christians. One reason to learn about radioactive dating is to see what it teaches us about God and His work in the creation. When learning about such a topic, we again are impressed with the wisdom of God displayed in His marvelous creation, which is so intricately woven together. In addition, we see God’s orderly and sovereign governance of the creation.

But in the age in which we live, it is also important

for us to understand radioactive dating as this technique is used to estimate the age of the earth. Modern scientists, using radioactive-dating techniques, estimate the earth to be approximately 4.5 billion years old. But by faith we believe the teaching of the Bible, that the earth is young—some 6,000 years old. Using such a technique, modern scientists assume an age of the earth that is in contradiction with the testimony of Holy Scripture. We repudiate such a position. But what do we make of radioactive dating? Is the technique itself flawed? What do we make of using the technique to estimate the age of “artifacts”?

Radioactive carbon

Carbon exists in the creation in various forms. The most abundant form of carbon (98.9%) is comprised of 6 protons, 6 neutrons, and 6 electrons, known as ^{12}C . This form has a stable combination of protons and neutrons. Another form of carbon is comprised of 6 protons, 8 neutrons, and 6 electrons, known as ^{14}C . Because the ratio of 6 protons and 8 neutrons is an unstable ratio, ^{14}C is radioactive. The unstable (radioactive) ^{14}C nucleus becomes stable by undergoing a spontaneous transformation in which a neutron is converted to a proton, releasing a form of radiation called a beta particle. The final result is that ^{14}C , in the process of becoming stable, loses a neutron and gains a proton, transforming into a nitrogen atom (^{14}N , 7 neutrons and 7 protons). Without the generation of any new ^{14}C , the supply of ^{14}C in the creation would slowly diminish over time.

But in God’s sovereign government of the creation new ^{14}C supplies are generated. In our upper atmosphere, nitrogen atoms (^{14}N), are being converted into new supplies of ^{14}C atoms. By this mechanism, which we call deposition, God provides a new supply of ^{14}C to be regularly generated in our atmosphere. The balance between deposition and radioactive decay is such that a relatively constant amount of ^{14}C is present in our atmosphere at all times.

Constant ^{14}C levels in living organisms

Most of the ^{14}C found in our atmosphere is found in combination with oxygen atoms to form carbon dioxide (CO_2), which in this case contains a radioactive carbon

atom (note that because only a small fraction—about one in a trillion, or 1 ppt—of all carbon is of the ^{14}C form, there is only a small amount of radioactive carbon dioxide in the atmosphere). Plants take in carbon dioxide (including radioactive versions of it) during the process of photosynthesis. Because the relative amount of ^{14}C in our atmosphere remains constant, the amount of radioactive CO_2 similarly remains constant. In the process of photosynthesis, the plant constructs different forms of sugar, which is, in turn, used by the plant itself to make its own leaves and stalk, as well as its fruit. While the ^{14}C incorporated into the plant by photosynthesis undergoes radioactive decay, thus decreasing the amount of ^{14}C in the plant, fresh supplies of ^{14}C are daily taken in by the plant during the photosynthesis process. Therefore, living plants, like grass for example, will maintain a level of ^{14}C that reflects the constant amount of this form of carbon in the atmosphere.

But that is not where this cycle of ^{14}C incorporation ends. A cow eats the grass that contains a constant level of ^{14}C . The forms of sugar in the grass fibers are decomposed by the cow during its digestive processes. The ^{14}C that was part of the sugar molecules in the grass is freed to be used in the cow to make other carbon-based molecules (important ones such as

DNA molecules, protein molecules, and fat molecules), which eventually become parts of the cow’s muscles, bone, and other bodily tissues and organs. Thus, the cow itself, by virtue of eating the grass that contained some radioactive carbon particles, now has radioactive carbon within it. The ^{14}C in the cow’s body parts will, of course, radioactively decay over time; but because the cow will eat more grass that contains ^{14}C particles, the cow will, during its life, maintain a constant level of ^{14}C that matches that of the grass and atmospheric CO_2 —as will all other living organisms, since all are connected to the process of photosynthesis in some way and, therefore, receive fresh supplies of ^{14}C on a regular basis.

One might wonder if the rate of intake of ^{14}C in particular organisms might differ, so that the abundance of ^{14}C might differ from organism to organism. As far as we can measure, living organisms contain a constant level of ^{14}C —a level that corresponds with the general percent abundancies found throughout creation (1

Understanding how radioactive dating works is important to Christians. One reason to learn about radioactive dating is to see what it teaches us about God and His work in the creation. When learning about such a topic, we again are impressed with the wisdom of God displayed in His marvelous creation, which is so intricately woven together.

ppt—part per trillion). While a tree has much more mass than a human, both organisms contain the same relative amount of ^{14}C ; that is, 1 part ^{14}C per trillion atoms of ^{12}C . And since all living organisms contain that same relative amount of ^{14}C (1 ppt), they also emit a specific level of beta radiation, relative to their size.

Radioactive dating

It should be apparent that dead organisms cannot absorb new sources of ^{14}C because dead organisms do not take in any new ^{14}C -based compounds. It should also, then, be apparent that dead organisms will over time have an increasingly lower amount of ^{14}C present in them due to the ongoing radioactive decay of this form of carbon. And therefore, dead organisms will, over time, emit less and less radiation.

And with that knowledge we can begin to understand how one might try to estimate the age of a dead (once-living) organism. Assuming that the rate of ^{14}C decay remains constant over time, one could, on the basis of the percentage of ^{14}C atoms yet remaining in the specimen, back-calculate to determine when the specimen was yet alive.

Let us consider the hypothetical historical example with which we began the article.

With modern instruments and techniques (mass spectrometry), the composition of the leather belt found along the Red River can be determined. By comparing the ratio of ^{14}C to ^{12}C of the dead organism (from which the leather belt was made) to the ratio of ^{14}C to ^{12}C in living organisms, the scientists can calculate how long ago it was that the dead organism had been alive. In living organisms this ratio is constant. In dead organisms the ratio decreases slowly at a constant rate. On the basis of this process, the scientist can determine how long ago the animal from which the leather belt was made lived. Perhaps the results of that study would indicate that the leather belt would have been made approximately 250 years ago—dating the belt to the late 1700s—providing support to the hypothesis that the belt perhaps belonged to some fur trader who had passed through the area.

Praise to the Creator!

By faith we believe that God created all things out of nothing and with a purpose—“giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices *to serve its Creator*” (Belgic Confession, Art. 12). All things have not only been created, but also are wisely and sovereignly upheld by our almighty God—for the purpose that they bring glory and honor to the One who created and upholds them. “Praise the LORD from the

earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling his word: mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl...” (Ps. 148:7-10). All creatures shout the praises of God as they reveal the great wisdom and power of our God.

As God’s covenant children, we ought to praise God for the beauty, order, and intricacy found in all of the creation—including radioactive elements. Radioactive decay truly is an amazing process. As we have seen, unstable ^{14}C atoms slowly transform into more stable atoms over time, while, at the same time, in God’s amazing government of the creation, new ^{14}C is formed at such a rate to replace the radioactively decaying ^{14}C —thus maintaining a remarkably *constant* level of ^{14}C in living organisms. May these unique details fill us with awe of our Creator and serve as a reminder to us to walk *daily* throughout the creation meditating on the mighty works of God that surround us—the Queen Anne’s Lace along the road; the brilliant planet (Venus) in the western sky; the peach trees in the local orchard; the frost-crystal designs on the window; the spider web in the corner of the barn; the nectar-sucking bumblebee; or the many wonders of our own human body.

When, by the gracious work of the Spirit, we live and walk out of faith, we render praise to God for such wondrous works! Pausing from all our busyness and considering God’s handiwork, we are humbled at our creaturely finiteness and awed by God’s infinite greatness. So finite are we that we find it difficult to comprehend even one simple process in a creation filled with seemingly infinite, interrelated processes. We hear the words of God: “Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God” (Job 37:14). Stand still and consider, for example, the amazing way in which unstable ^{14}C atoms become stable. Stand still and consider the marvelous details of how ^{14}C decays and is also generated to maintain a constant balance! What a marvelous, almighty, all-wise, and sovereign God we serve! And this God is our God! He who so marvelously directs even the tiny particles of the creation is directing every aspect of our lives, preparing us for our home in heaven. All glory and praise be to Him! “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen” (Ps 72:19).

And thus, with a view to honoring the almighty Creator God, we will return, in a future article, the Lord willing, to the value and appropriateness of radioactive decay as a tool to date artifacts and to determine the age of the earth.



Church and state

Mr. Brian VanEngen, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney

Previous article in this series: April 1 2018, p. 307.

The other side of the coin: The Supreme Court considers freedom of conscience in the light of *Obergefell* (2)

In the last installment under this rubric, we looked at the pending United States Supreme Court case of *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. This case, which involved a homosexual couple's claim of discrimination against a Colorado baker who refused to make them a wedding cake, raised issues of freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The Supreme Court has now issued its opinion in the matter, and while some of the decision is as expected, there are some aspects of the ruling that are noteworthy.¹

The bakery in the case was sanctioned by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission for discriminating against the couple because they were homosexual. Jack Phillips, the owner of the bakery, stated that homosexual marriage was contrary to his Christian religion. As was discussed previously, much of the briefing submitted in the case focused on the claim that the actions of the Civil Rights Commission violated his freedom of speech by forcing him to create a cake expressing support for homosexual marriage. This focus on free speech rather than freedom of religion was undoubtedly due to the fact that the courts have previously allowed state regulations to impinge upon the free exercise of religion in a number of contexts. Nevertheless, the decision rendered focused squarely on Jack Phillips' freedom of religion.

The Court's majority opinion began by acknowledging that the case before it involved reconciling two competing legal principles. The first principle is the authority of the government to protect the rights of homosexuals from discrimination, as was recognized in the *Obergefell* decision. The second principle is the right of all persons to exercise the fundamental freedoms granted under the First Amendment, most notably the rights of free speech and free exercise of religion. Many

commentators had thought that the Court would come down with a narrow majority on one side or the other with a very narrowly tailored ruling, finding that under the very particular facts of this case, one set of principles or the other required either the state or the baker to prevail. The Court's ruling is tailored quite narrowly on the facts of this case, but the Court's approach was somewhat unexpected.

The Court came down on the side of the baker, Jack Phillips. However, rather than focusing on Phillips' rights, the Court focused instead on the lack of religious neutrality demonstrated in the actions of the state civil rights commission while prosecuting the case. The Court briefly discussed the endless number of different factual scenarios that could potentially give rise to a claim to protection of free speech or freedom of religion, but then noted that "the Colorado Civil Rights Commission's consideration of this case was inconsistent with the State's obligation of religious neutrality."

Although the outcome of the case was in the bakery's favor, the reasoning and some of the language of the decision is disappointing for those in support of religious freedom. The Court stated that the law was clear that the baker, "in his capacity as the owner of a business serving the public, might have his right to the free exercise of religion limited by generally applicable laws." In this case the Court never addressed the question of whether this was a permissible limitation because it found that the State, through the Civil Rights Commission, had showed hostility and even contempt for the baker's religion.

The Court reviewed the proceedings before the Civil Rights Commission in some detail, quoting from the statements made by commissioners in these proceedings. The Court ruled that these statements showed hostility towards Phillips' religion. For instance, the Court quoted one of the commissioners, who stated

¹ *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 584 U.S. (2018)

“And to me it is one of the most despicable pieces of rhetoric that people can use to—to use their religion to hurt others.”² As the Court stated, this statement disparaged Phillips’ religion in two ways, “by describing it as despicable and also by characterizing it as merely rhetorical—something insubstantial and even insincere.”³ The Court noted that, contrary to the characterization of the Civil Rights Commission, Phillips’ motivation was his sincere religious beliefs. The Court reasoned that since they were sincerely held religious beliefs, the State had a duty to weigh the infringement on those beliefs with the State’s interest in preventing discrimination. The Court found that this was not done, but that the Commission had dismissed Phillips’ beliefs as mere rhetoric. This aspect of the case highlights the need to have our religious beliefs clearly stated, so that the government cannot easily dismiss them as insincere rhetoric or as a mere pretext for discrimination.

The Court in this case stated that, once sincere religious beliefs are implicated, the Free Exercise Clause “bars even ‘subtle departures from neutrality’ on matters of religion.”⁴ The Court delineated a number of factors to be considered in determining government neutrality in regard to religion. These factors include: 1) the historical background of the decision under challenge; 2) the specific series of events leading to the enactment or official policy in question, and 3) the legislative or administrative history, including contemporaneous statements made by members of the decision-making body.⁵

The future impact of the Court’s decision remains to be seen. The decision is not a clear-cut legal victory for either side of the issue. The Court did clearly condemn government action based on hostility towards religion. We know from Scripture that the world hates the church, not because the church impinges on the rights of others, but because the church stands for the truth and the world hates that truth. Therefore, the court’s decision condemning such hostility promises a measure of protection for the sincere religious beliefs of the church and its individual members. For instance, the Court states in its ruling that “When it comes to weddings, it can be assumed that a member of the clergy who objects to gay marriage on religious grounds could not be com-

elled to perform the ceremony without denial of his or her right to the free exercise of religion.”⁶

Another interesting aspect of the Court’s ruling is that the Court’s decision was a 7 to 2 majority. In most issues of this sort in recent years, the Court has been divided 5 to 4, with Justice Anthony Kennedy casting the deciding vote. In this case, two of the court’s liberal wing joined with Kennedy and the conservatives in condemning the Colorado Civil Rights Commission’s open hostility towards traditional Christianity.

However, some aspects of the Court’s decision are troubling for believers. The Court focused, not on the strength of the freedom of religion, but on the obvious hostility towards religion demonstrated by the Civil Rights Commission. This begs the question of what the outcome would have been if the members of the Commission had not openly made derogatory comments about Phillips’ religion. Also, when discussing Phillips’ refusal to provide the wedding cake, the Court states that his “dilemma was particularly understandable given the background of legal principles and administration of the law in Colorado at that time.”⁷ The Court went on to note that at the time the case arose, homosexual mar-

riage was not recognized as valid in Colorado. This comment also raises the question as to whether the outcome would have been different if homosexual marriage had already been legal in Colorado. The Col-

orado government apparently does not believe the issue is settled either. Immediately after the Supreme Court’s ruling, they began new proceedings against Phillips for refusing to create a cake to celebrate an attorney’s attempt to change from a male to a female.⁸

We have the confidence that all things are in the Lord’s hands and that all of history unfolds according to His plan. We are called to live without fear, availing ourselves of the means He gives us to protect our freedom, and not fearing the hostility that we experience when the world impinges on this freedom.

We must not be afraid to proclaim our beliefs clearly on such issues, so that the world is exposed in its blatant hatred of God’s truths. The Court recognized that hatred in this case, and we should clearly maintain our position so that there can be no question of the world’s motivation as it seeks to silence the church.

We know from Scripture that the world hates the church, not because the church impinges on the rights of others, but because the church stands for the truth and the world hates that truth.

2 *Masterpiece v. Colorado*, at 13.

3 *Masterpiece v. Colorado*, at 13-14.

4 *Masterpiece v. Colorado*, at 17.

5 *Masterpiece v. Colorado*.

6 *Masterpiece v. Colorado*, at 10.

7 *Masterpiece v. Colorado*, at 11.

8 <http://www.adflegal.org/enough-is-enough?>

Trinity PRC: new addition completed

The second week of July 2018 was an exciting and special time for the congregation of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. On Tuesday July 10, Trinity held a dedication program for their new 11,100 sq. ft. sanctuary and narthex. The cornerstone was set and a program was held, consisting of special numbers from the Sunday School children and the choir, as well as a demonstration of the new organ, all of which set the tone of a joyful evening. The following Sunday, July 15, Trinity conducted her first worship service in the new sanctuary and, for the first time in many years, all of the members of Trinity could worship together—in one place in their own sanctuary.

For those not as familiar with Trinity PRC, the following is a brief history. Trinity began as a daughter church from Hudsonville PRC in 2001 with 45 families and 180 souls. In God's good providence, our current facility became available when Hudsonville Reformed Church moved. The old sanctuary served Trinity well over the beginning years but, with the Lord's blessing, Trinity grew both internally and externally, so that in 2012, a Long-Range Planning Committee was formed to look into larger facility options. With 118 families and 456 souls, Trinity's congregation filled the

main sanctuary and balcony, and in 2014 started a scheduled rotation of members sitting in the basement and watching on closed circuit video feed. You can imagine the joy of not having to sit in the basement any longer after 4 ½ years!

In August of 2015, after reaching a monetary milestone, the LRP/Expansion Committee was re-established. One year later the Council brought a proposal to the congregation to build an addition on the north side of the existing building. The proposed addition consisted of a new sanctuary, narthex, restrooms, and included an elevator to allow handicap access to all levels of the addition and existing building.

On May 1, 2017 the congregation gave approval to proceed with the construction project. The project began in June with the demolition of two detached buildings, and thirteen months later an occupancy permit was received. The dedication program was held the very next day.

The cornerstone of the new addition that was set during the dedication program has engraved the text from Psalm 119:90, "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." It is the hope and prayer of the Trinity PRC congregation that the Lord will continue to bless them with the faithful preaching of His Word and the ability to freely worship and praise Him in the new sanctuary for generations to come.

To all the readers of the *SB*, if you have the opportunity, Trinity now has the space and invites you to visit and join in a worship service, held every Sunday at 9:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.

Trinity Expansion Committee,
Mr. Doug Pastoor



Inside the new sanctuary



Aerial view including new addition on the left

Reports—Classis West

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Classis West met in regular session on August 29-30, 2018. The meeting was hosted by Peace PRC (Lansing, IL), but all sessions were held in the facilities of the

neighboring Crete PRC, since Peace is in the process of transitioning to a new building. Rev. John Marcus chaired the meeting.



Rev. Jonathan and Sarah Langerak

The highlight of this meeting was the examination of Pastor-elect Jonathan Langerak, who had received and accepted the call extended to him by Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD). Mr. Langerak led a worship service on the night before Classis, expounding God's Word from Proverbs 3:5-

6. He was then examined the following day in the six loci of Dogmatics, Knowledge of Scripture, Knowledge of the Confessions, Controversy, and Practica. With the concurrence of the synodical deputies from Classis East, Classis unanimously approved his examination and advised Heritage PRC to proceed to his ordination into the ministry. Mr. Langerak was ordained in a special worship service held on August 31. We give thanks to God for supplying another under-shepherd, and pray for God's blessings upon the ministry of Rev. Jonathan Langerak.

In closed session, Classis dealt with the request of a consistory to increase censure on an impenitent member. After hearing evidence of the member's impenitence and the consistory's careful labor, Classis advised them to proceed to making the second announcement of the second step of discipline.

Classis was also informed by a consistory that it had, with the concurrence of a neighboring consistory, suspended its pastor from exercising his office, and that it sought Classis' approval to proceed with his deposition. With great sadness, Classis voted unanimously to advise the consistory to proceed, and the synodical deputies concurred.

On its agenda Classis also had an appeal from a member of a congregation against the decisions of his consistory. Classis declared two parts of the appeal not legally before it, as it was not finished at the consistory level. Classis did enter into one part of the appeal and gave careful instruction to both the appellant and the consistory concerning the procedural issues that were raised. By decision Classis also reminded the appellant of the importance of brevity in submitting materials and the importance of being patient with his consistory as they work through the issues.

Classis also approved an overture from Hull PRC to Synod 2019 to add a statement to the bylaws of the denomination regarding our stance on marriage and homosexuality and to write policies regarding this issue that might be adopted by local consistories to aid them in the legal protection of their property against lawsuits. Classis judged that the overture made compelling arguments for the legal protection afforded by such an action and that it would be helpful to local consistories.

The following classical appointment schedule for Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, AB) was drawn up: Rev. N. Langerak (September 16 and 23), Rev. R. Barnhill (October 7 and 14), Rev. S. Regnerus (October 21 and 28), Rev. E. Guichelaar (December 9 and 16), Rev. B. Huizinga (January 13 and 20), Rev. M. De Boer (January 27 and February 3), Rev. J. Laning (February 17 and 24), Rev. J. Engelsma (March 17 and 24), Rev. S. Key (March 31 and April 7), Rev. D. Lee (April 21 and 28), and Rev. A. Brummel (May 12 and 19).

The expenses of Classis totaled \$9,350.47.

The next meeting of Classis West is scheduled for March 6, 2019, in Heritage PRC, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk, Classis West



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdome, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

Which was the only continent not represented at the recent British Reformed Fellowship Conference held at Hebron Hall, Cardiff, in Wales? Answer later in this column.

Dordt 400 conference

The Theological School of the PRCA is sponsoring a three-day conference commemorating the great Synod

of 1618-19, planned for April 25-27, 2019. Entitled "Dordt 400—Safe-guarding the Reformed Tradition," the event will take place, Lord willing, at Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Learn more and enter the writing contest at dordt400.org.

Sister-church activities

The recent British Reformed Fellowship Conference rejoiced in 116 registered participants along with 11

day visitors. The weather was wonderful and many proclaimed it the best conference yet. The conference theme was “The Reformed Family—According to the Word of God.” The main speakers were Prof. David Engelsma and Rev. Andy Lanning, who gave three speeches each. All 11 presentations/speeches can be watched online on Covenant PRC’s YouTube channel and will soon be made into sets of CDs and DVDs, available for sale. The next conference is already being planned. Mark the dates of July 11-18, 2020 at the location of Castlewellan Castle in Northern Ireland. Sounds like a great family vacation!

Rev. Daniel Kleyn and his wife Sharon traveled from the Manila area of the Philippines to the Covenant ERC of Singapore to provide pulpit supply there while the CERC is vacant. Other pastors slated to supply the pulpit there in the coming months are Revs. A. Spriensma, J. Holstege, A. denHartog, and Prof. R. Cammenga.

Minister activities

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, considered the call to be minister-on-loan to the CERC in Singapore. On September 9, his decline of their call was announced.

Grandville, MI PRC announced a trio consisting of Rev. N. Decker (Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI), Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon, IA PRC), and Rev. E. Guichelaar (Randolph, WI PRC). On August 26 Grandville called Rev. Decker to be their next pastor.

Pastor-elect Jonathan Langerak sustained his Classical examination at the meeting of Classis West on August 29 and was ordained and installed as pastor of Heritage PRC of Sioux Falls, SD on August 31. Rev. Langerak preached his inaugural sermon on September 2, using the text from Ezra 3:1-6, and the theme: “Worship First for the Restored Remnant: A God-Focused Life.” We thank God for another faithful messenger of the Word! May God bless Rev. Langerak and the Heritage congregation under the preaching!

Young adult activities

Lynden PRC Young Adults Retreat updates:

We have secured a location for our retreat during July 1-5, 2019! It will take place at Mt. Baker Bibleway Camp. Check it out at <http://www.mtbakercamp.org/home.do>. We hope to include activities such as a day trip to beautiful Artist Point, white water rafting, and more. Registration is set to open in February 2019, so don’t miss out! We encourage any young adults post-high school age to attend. Further details have been posted to our Facebook page: Lynden PRC Young

Adults Retreat 2019. Request an invite to see these details, or message the group if you have any questions!

Congregational activities

Southeast PRC recently sold her church building and anticipated worshipping in Adams Christian School beginning Sunday, September 9. A luncheon and short program was held Sunday, September 2, following the final worship service in the church. The new owners, Redemption Church, took possession of the property on September 15.

The congregation at Peace PRC of Dyer, IN began worshipping in their new facility on September 16, with a dedication planned for October 5.

Advance Notice: The Protestant Reformed Student Orchestra (PRSO) has scheduled its annual concert for Friday, February 8 at 7 p.m. Location is the St. Cecilia Music Center in Grand Rapids, MI. Hope to see you there!

First PRC of Holland, MI voted recently to approve the parking lot repair project. And a new sound system was to be installed in Southwest PRC.

Catechism season has begun in the Protestant Reformed Churches. May God bless this endeavor as we strive to instruct the next generation in the truths of His Word!

Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of Peace PRC sponsored a presentation by home missionary, Pastor Audred Spriensma, who spoke on “The Work of Home Missions: How We Have Done This Work; How We Are Continuing This Work.” The presentation was to be at the Lansing location. The Evangelism Committee also informed the congregation that it ordered a book (*Behold, I Come Quickly*) and a pamphlet (“Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life”) and that both would be found in their mailboxes.

Young people’s activities

Mum Sale: Fall is in the air, and Zion Young Peoples’ sold mums to help you with your fall decor! Two sizes were available in pink/lavender, purple, white, yellow, orange/bronze, and red. The mums were picked up on Monday, September 17 at Heritage Christian School.

Trivia answer

Africa was the only continent not represented at the British Reformed Fellowship Conference. Apart from those from the various parts of the British Isles,

attendees flew in from Canada, the USA, Brazil, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Singapore, and Australia! Wow! What a gathering!

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:3

Announcements

HIS MERCY ENDURETH FOREVER
— PSALM 136 —



O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.
—Psalm 136:1, 5

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Faith Christian School of Randolph, WI is seeking one full-time teacher for a high school position in 2018-2019. There is the possibility of teaching some 7th and 8th grade classes depending on the applicant's abilities and preferences. All interested individuals should contact Jack Regnerus (jackbuiltregs@gmail.com or 920-296-3529) or Mike Vander Veen (mvanderveen@randolphfcs.org or 920-296-4406) for more information or to apply.

Bound Volume

With the September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer*, volume 94 is completed. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

- Oct. 7 “Chosen to Be a Special People” (1)
Deuteronomy 7:6-9
- Oct. 14 “Chosen to Be a Special People” (2)
Deuteronomy 7:6-9
- Oct. 21 “Abraham Offers Up Isaac”
Hebrews 11:17-19
- Oct. 28 “The Scripture: God’s Word” (Reformation)
II Peter 1:20, 21