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The covenant and Dordt: Election
the foundation of the covenant—
Scripture and the confessions

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Tongue

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illumination

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An exciting venture in
the Philippines:
A PRCP seminary

Rev. Daniel Kleyn



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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Redeeming the time

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Ephesians 5:15, 16

Time has an unrelenting hold on us. That is evident in our conversations. “Sorry, I’m late!” “I didn’t have time.” “The summer has flown by!” We complain that there just are not enough hours in the day. This is something that touches each of us, young and old alike.

Solomon expresses it so beautifully in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven....” As we sing from Psalm 90, “Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away; they fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.”

What are we doing with time? Are we simply living as the world lives—drifting along, living for the moment? Are we squandering the precious gift of time? Do we fail to see God’s purpose in time? The apostle Paul exhorts us to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time!

Redeeming the time

The calling to redeem the time sounds like a strange admonition. Literally, it means “to buy the time.” It concerns our use of time. The idea is that we actually take advantage of the opportunities that the Lord places before us.

Time, we must remember, was created by God in the beginning. While He is eternal, above time, He created time as a part of this earthly creation. The whole creation, and we along with it, are bound to time. It is an inescapable part of our lives, ruling us like a tyrant. Man, in his vain imagination, dreams of escaping time’s grasp by means of a “time machine” or a “fountain of youth.” But time controls all of our life, all that we do, and the whole creation in which we live. Everything is governed by the passing of moments, of hours, of days, of weeks, of months, of years. Already as young children, we are soon watching the clock. We find ourselves too busy. We never seem to have enough time.

Apart from Christ, time is an enemy! Time in our fall-

en world means change, death, decay, destruction. Time carries man to the grave. Apart from Christ, we could only cry, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2).

But the apostle speaks of time here from the point of view of its interpretation, its significance in light of God’s purpose. He uses a word that would have us look at time as it is used by God to accomplish His eternal purpose. The goal of time is the end of this world, the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, the full realization of His kingdom.

It is this time that we are called to redeem. And that is possible because at the center of time and history stands the cross. In the fullness of time Christ came and through His cross and resurrection He redeemed the time. He is now ruling, exalted as the Lord of time. He directs all things unto the gathering of His church and the coming of His kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth where time shall be no more.

But for now, we as His children continue our pilgrim journey through time. And our calling is to redeem the time! If we fail to do so, we simply live as the world lives. We set our hearts upon the things that are below, which are passing away. We find no true peace, no real contentment. And as our days pass swiftly by, time will sweep us off into the vanity of the grave.

Being redeemed by the blood of the cross, having received new life that is the life of Christ, by the grace and Spirit of God, we redeem the time. We view all things in the light of Scripture. We understand that time is serving the coming of God’s kingdom. And we live with uplifted heads, longing for the day of Christ’s return that ushers in that kingdom.

We strive to live then using time in the service of the kingdom. Our hopes and desires are fixed upon the things of the kingdom of heaven. Practically speaking, that means that the church will be at the center of our lives. Now in time and throughout history the kingdom and cause of God are represented in the life and salvation of the church. Mindful of this, we will seek the welfare of the church.

We will work diligently in our daily calling to provide for our covenant homes and the causes of God’s kingdom. We will enjoy fellowship with our fellow saints

that we may be mutually encouraged in our pilgrim journey. We will be involved in the life and activity of the church because she is our connection with Christ and His kingdom. Redeeming the time involves every sphere of life—our work, our recreation, our home, our education, our church.

Walk circumspectly

To do this we are called to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” A wise man is one who reckons with reality and adapts his life to it. In contrast, a fool is one who, though he knows better, denies reality and lives in a way that is contrary to it. Reality is that time is under the curse of the eternal God leading to death and judgment apart from Christ. Reality is that time is redeemed by Christ who is coming quickly to realize His everlasting kingdom.

But a fool, though he is aware of this reality, ignores it. He continues to eat, drink, and make merry as if this world continues forever. Consciously he sets his heart upon the things that perish, the pleasures and treasures of this world.

Obviously, all who do not belong to Christ are fools. No matter how intelligent or wealthy they may be, they are fools! No matter how spectacular their earthly accomplishments, they are fools. Ignoring reality, they blindly stagger through life, plunging at last into judgment.

But the wise are different, though not by nature. Redeemed by grace, enlightened by the Word and Spirit of God, having received of God wisdom from above, the wise discern the times. They are able to see that this world is passing away with the lusts thereof. Reckoning with reality, they strive to walk as children of the light. According to this Word of God, they walk “circumspectly.” That means that they have their eyes wide open, spiritually speaking, looking all around. In contrast to the staggering fool, the wise walk very carefully, avoiding the spiritual pitfalls and snares.

Because they are wise, believers redeem the time. They cling to Christ and His cross. They rejoice in the power of His resurrection that delivers from the ravages of time. They long for the day of Christ’s return when time shall be no more. Meanwhile, the wise labor for the welfare of His church as they continue their pilgrim journey.

Are you walking circumspectly, redeeming the time? Every day there are opportunities along our pathway. Take advantage of those opportunities! Don’t let them slip by in the stream of time! This applies to all of us, regardless of our age.

Children are given time, time they must redeem. Now is the time for learning, learning the wisdom of God’s

Word, learning obedience. What a waste of time to spend hours playing video games or watching television!

Young people, God gives you time, time to redeem. John writes, “I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (I John 2:14b). Now is the time to become strong, spiritually strong. Don’t make excuses—“I don’t have time to learn my catechism; I don’t have time to prepare for Young People’s Society.” Now is the time to become convicted in your own hearts and minds of the truth!

For parents, now is the time for commitment to the spiritual welfare of your home. Redeem the time, precious time to nurture, instruct the children, by word and by example, in the way that they should go. God does not give us children simply to feed, clothe, and entertain them. Use the time God provides to teach them the wonderful works of God.

For all of us, in all of our life, whatever our age, position, and circumstances, let us redeem the time. Let us live and labor with a view to God’s kingdom, the welfare of His church. Help, encourage, exhort, edify one another. Pray for one another, for Christ’s church, and for the coming of His kingdom. Use every time of life, every experience of life, to the very best advantage, in the fear of God!

Because the days are evil

The apostle emphasizes the urgency of this calling. Redeem the time because the days are evil! They were at that time in the dark days of the Roman empire. The days are even more evil today, though man in his pride boasts that things are always and only getting better and improving. This is also the thinking of fools who ignore reality. As time marches on, the days become more and more evil. In connection with the amazing advances in science and technology sin abounds as wicked man uses all things in rebellion against God. The cup of iniquity is rapidly filling. When we see and hear what is happening today, we wonder that Christ does not return now in judgment.

Just think of the evil of our days—the lawlessness, the violence, the immorality, the apostasy, the persecution! The days are evil! Who can deny it? It is to the wise a warning not to set their hearts upon the earthly. Rather, they look to the immanent return of the Savior.

We sense the urgency of all this, do we not? Walk carefully, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, for the days are evil! Let us seek the grace of God unto that end. For we must confess that we often fail so miserably. We squander so much time. We waste so many opportunities. We are so often poor stewards who have

but little time for the most important things, the spiritual things.

This is not the time to walk carelessly! The very evil of our days should serve as a powerful incentive to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time. Look to Christ, the

Captain of your salvation. Watch and pray. Hear His Word, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).



Editorial

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

The covenant and Dordt: Election, the foundation of the covenant— Scripture and the confessions

That election and the covenant of God are linked has been noted from Ephesians 1. There, in the context of teaching eternal election in Jesus Christ (v. 3), the apostle states, “having predestinated us unto the adoption of children in Jesus Christ” (v. 5). Since in this verse predestination is a synonym for election, election is unto adoption as children. And adoption is an obvious covenant reality. This connection between the covenant and adoption is affirmed in the Reformed “Form for the Administration of Baptism” which teaches that “God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us that He doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us as His children and heirs.” In His covenant of grace, God takes His people, chosen in Christ, to Himself as His own children. He instructs them to call Him “Father,” and the Spirit of His only begotten Son enters into those children testifying with their spirits that they are the children of God, with the result that they cry out, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15, 16).

In this editorial we delve into more biblical and confessional teaching that election is the foundation of the covenant.

The truth of election as foundation of the covenant is inseparably connected with Christ’s proper position in the covenant. Reformed believers of all backgrounds acknowledge that Christ is the Mediator of the covenant. On that, Scripture and the confessions are explicit. The Heidelberg Catechism, already in Question 15 asks, “What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?” The Catechism goes on to identify Christ

as the Mediator in Q&A 18 and 36. The Belgic Confession likewise testifies:

We believe that we have no access unto God, but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us. (Art. 26)

The Canons of Dordt speak of Christ appointed by God as the “Mediator and Head of the elect” (I, 7); as “the Mediator” (V, 7); and as the “the Surety and Mediator of a better, that is, the new covenant” (II, B, 2). These confessions faithfully express this biblical teaching concerning Christ’s mediatorship in the covenant.

Hebrews 8:6 teaches that Jesus is “the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” (See also Heb. 9:15; 12:24; I Tim. 2:4). That Christ is the Mediator of the covenant of grace is not disputed.

That Christ is Head of His church and Head of the elect is also recognized Reformed doctrine. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of Christ as Head of His church in Q&A 49, 50, 51, and 57. Likewise the Belgic Confession affirms Christ, “the only Head of the Church” (Arts. 29, 31). As noted above, Canons I, 7. affirms Christ as “Mediator and Head of the elect.”

This is the plain testimony of the Scriptures as well. Ephesians 1: 22-23 teaches that God “hath put all things under his [Christ’s] feet, and gave him to be the

head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (See also Eph. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19.)

Virtually all in the Reformed camp affirm that Christ is Mediator of the covenant, and Head of His church, the elect church.

The point of dispute is whether the Bible and the confessions teach that Christ is the Head of the covenant, which is to say, Head of all those with whom God establishes His covenant. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that God establishes a conditional covenant with every baptized child. In their theology, election does not govern the covenant of grace. Therefore, they deny that Christ is Head of the covenant, for if Christ is Head, it follows that He represents every member of the covenant, and every member must be redeemed and saved in His blood. That would necessarily limit the covenant people to the elect. They insist, Christ is Mediator of the covenant, not Head.

Over against that, we confess that Christ is both Mediator and Head of the covenant people, and that God establishes His covenant only with those who are in Christ, that is, the elect.

If one is looking for a verse in the Bible that states explicitly the paragraph above, he will not find it. The same is true of many established truths that the church confesses. One cannot find a text that affirms explicitly that God is one in essence and three in persons. That truth must be drawn from various passages of the Bible, comparing Scripture with Scripture. So it is with the place of Christ in God’s covenant.

Let us, then, examine the teaching of Scripture on Christ’s position in the covenant.

We start with Romans 5:12, which teaches that Adam is the legal head of the human race: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” All men died in Adam, because Adam was the legal head of the race. In verse 14, we learn that this Adam is “the figure of him that was to come,” which is Christ. With Christ as the legal Head, there is salvation from sin and death: “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (Rom. 5:15). And that free gift is justification (vv. 16-21).

But salvation to whom? Of whom is Christ the Head? Answer: His covenant people. Why so? Because Adam was not only the *head* of the race, he was the *covenant head* of the race. As Hosea 6:7 states, “But they like men have transgressed the covenant.” There the word “men” is literally the Hebrew word “Adam,” indicting that Adam’s fall was a transgression of the covenant. Adam fell as head of the covenant. Adam is the picture of Christ, the Head of the new covenant.

In harmony with that position of Christ as covenant Head, Scripture testifies that God established His covenant with Christ. This is the clear teaching of Genesis 17:7 and Galatians 3:16.

Genesis 17:7 is probably the best known “covenant text” in Scripture. There God promises Abraham, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Here God establishes His covenant with Abraham and his seed. This covenant is eternal (everlasting). God promises to be the God of Abraham and his seed in their generations. This verse establishes that God’s covenant is with believers and their children.

But full understanding of Genesis 17:7 requires the Spirit’s commentary on the verse in Galatians 3:16—“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” The point that the inspired Paul makes is that the “seed” of Genesis 17:7, to whom the promise was made was Christ. He is “the seed” referred to in God’s promise to Abraham, “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy *seed* after thee.” God indicated that He, the triune God, establishes His everlasting covenant with Christ.

How are the children of believers included in the covenant? Galatians 3:29 answers that: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” And who are Christ’s? Those chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3). Those given to Him by the Father (John 10:29). Christ knows them (v. 14), calls them by name (v. 3), and laid down His life for them (vv. 15, 17, 18).

The covenant is made with Christ (the Seed), and with those who are His, namely, the elect. This demands that Christ be the legal Head of the elect people—the Head of the covenant.

Over against that, we confess that Christ is both Mediator and Head of the covenant people, and that God establishes His covenant only with those who are in Christ, that is, the elect.

The beautiful covenantal Psalm 89 teaches the same truth. The psalmist begins with praise to the LORD (God's covenant name) for His faithfulness (vv. 1, 2). Then the LORD speaks (v. 3): "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant." This is repeated in verse 19: "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people."

As the psalm progresses, it becomes obvious that David is the type, and the real "chosen one" is Christ. For God testifies "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Christ is "the chosen one" of God. Of that there can be no doubt.¹

With that understanding, notice that God promises to His chosen (v. 28), "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him." The plain language is that God establishes His covenant with Christ. What of the covenant people? They are identified in the psalm as Christ's children in verses 30ff. ("If his children..."). God establishes His covenant with Christ and with Christ's children. Hebrews 2:13 speaks of those saved by Christ as His children, that is, "the children which God hath given" Christ. This is another

¹ Isaiah 42:1 also calls the Messiah God's elect: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles."

reference to the elect, as in John 10:29—the sheep that the Father gave Jesus. (See also John 6:37, 39.) These are the covenant people.

Psalm 89 then sets forth a most significant implication of the truth that God establishes His covenant with Christ, and with those chosen in Christ, namely, that

God's covenant cannot be broken. The covenant certainly is not maintained by the children's activity. The Lord Himself points this out:

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then

will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes (vv. 30-32).

However that may be, God testifies, "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail" (v. 33) and therefore, "My covenant will I not break" (v. 34). The covenant of God, made with Christ (and with His children) cannot be broken. For Christ, God's own Son, cannot fail. He will never "transgress the covenant," as did Adam.

God's covenant is with Christ, the Head of the covenant people, the King on the eternal throne of David. And in Christ, God's covenant is with those chosen eternally in Christ. Election governs the covenant—both its Head ("my chosen"), and all the members of the covenant ("my chosen people").

The Canons maintain the same truth, as we will see next time.

The covenant is made with Christ (the Seed), and with those who are His, namely, the elect. This demands that Christ be the legal Head of the elect people—the Head of the covenant.

Editor's notes

Prof. Russell Dykstra

A new volume year for the *SB*

With thanksgiving to God, we begin the new publishing year for the *Standard Bearer*. Since the first issue of the magazine appeared in October of 1924, this begins the 96th-volume year. Let us not overlook God's faithfulness in providing the financial means and the writers all these years. For the coming year, 39 men and women have agreed to contribute from one to as many as ten articles for the *SB*.

What changes will come for Volume 96? The writers added to the list this year (though some have writ-

ten in the past) include Revs. V. Ibe and S. Key ("Meditations"), and Revs. N. Decker and A. Spriensma ("All Around Us"). Rev. W. Bruinsma agreed to add to his writing load (as writer for "Go Ye into all the World") by contributing also to "When Thou Sittest in Thine House." Rev. J. Holstege agreed to join Rev. W. Langerak (with his full agreement) in "A Word Fitly Spoken." Prof. D. Kuiper will resume writing "Ministering to the Saints" after some time of writing on other topics, most recently the Synod of Dordt.

We call attention to two new rubrics for the coming year. Rev. C. Griess will be writing articles on apologetics in “I Believe.” And Prof. Kuiper plans to write short articles on church history in “Pillar and Ground of the Truth.”

We thank all the writers of the past year for their valuable contributions and wish the current writers God’s blessing in their work.

Another change deserves special mention. For the first time in many years, Prof. D. Engelsma will not be a regular contributor in the *SB*. At the annual *SB* staff meeting in June, Prof. Engelsma informed us that this was at *his* request. Prof. Engelsma’s *SB* articles first appeared in the mid-1960s. Through the years he was a regular contributor to the rubric on doctrine. A number of his special topical series have been printed as pamphlets (for example, “Modern Bible Translations”) or as books (for example, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*) or as chapters in books.

Many of his topical series are as pertinent and valuable today as when they are written. (I encourage the reader to revisit the series on Reprobation in the Canons, Homosexuality, or especially, Education in the Reformation.) He has reviewed countless books. And we do not overlook the most monumental contribution, namely, the sixteen years of being the sole editor of the *SB* (1988-2004).

Prof. Engelsma’s writing was profitable because it was always carefully and thoroughly researched, clearly presented, and antithetically analyzed. This continued to the last article published in the September 15 issue, completing his treatment on Eschatology. On behalf of the many readers through over five decades, thank you, Prof. Engelsma. Your writing will be missed. We look forward to more profitable books from the RFPA authored by you, if God permit. Is it too much to hope for a complete Dogmatics?

RJD



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland

- Dr. Mackereth’s pronoun problem
- The author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* repudiates the Christian faith

Dr. Mackereth’s pronoun problem

Dr. David Mackereth has worked as a medical doctor in the Accident and Emergency Department of government-run hospitals in England for over twenty years. Last year he became a benefits assessor for the UK Department of Work and Pensions, a job that involves determining whether a person fits the criteria necessary to claim social-welfare benefits on the grounds of disability. A few days after he began his new job, he claims he was asked in a performance evaluation a hypothetical question: “If you have a man, 6 feet tall with a beard, who says he wants to be addressed as ‘she’ and ‘Mrs,’ would you do that?” Dr. Mackereth, who is a professing Christian, answered the hypothetical question in the negative, citing his religious

beliefs for his hypothetical refusal, for he, like all Bible-believing Christians, believes that gender is not fluid but that God has made two—and only two—distinct genders, and that a person should not be legally obliged to use pronouns that do not correspond to his or her biological gender. His case is now being heard before an Employment Tribunal in Birmingham, for he claims wrongful dismissal and religious prejudice on the part of his employer.

Recently, the good doctor appeared on “Good Morning Britain” to discuss the story with British journalist and TV presenter Piers Morgan. Morgan’s hostility was clear from the beginning. The interview began with Dr. Mackereth explaining that, according to Christianity, a change of gender is not possible. In

response, Morgan said, “You understand that that makes you a bigot?” Somewhat taken aback, Mackereth asked, “Define bigot,” which Morgan then defined as someone “woefully intolerant of people...who have gone through a difficult transition,” asking the good doctor whether he “shouldn’t just find it in [his] Christian heart, given that [he’s] such a Christian, to respect that.” Mackereth attempted to explain his objections: “Well, the Bible tells us that God made us male and female; he made us for his own glory. If I’m a bigot, then the whole of Christianity throughout history is bigotry. I don’t believe that. I believe Christianity is the truth of God.” In a stunning display of ignorance of the Bible, Morgan challenged Mackereth: “The Bible says that if you look at people in an adulterous manner you should be stoned to death. Do you agree with that?” Then he added, “Given your self-righteousness, do you wander around the streets of your city looking for people who are looking at people in a lustful way and stone them to death?” Mackereth attempted to defend his position: “You haven’t established that I am self-righteous. I am a sinner saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. I carry the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I long for the same thing for everybody, which is to know him. That includes people of every kind of background, but you’re right: if we were to apply the Bible without its context, literally, every one of us could be stoned to death.” Visibly disgusted with Mackereth, Morgan spat: “You should stone yourself to death.”

Morgan, for no other reason than that he needed a transgender perspective, then turned to India Willoughby, a transgender journalist and presenter, born Jonathan Willoughby. Willoughby is neither a theologian, nor a jurist, and therefore could not be expected to have anything useful to contribute to the discussion. Willoughby opined: “The Bible is full of contradictions,” giving as the example that God forbade the eating of shellfish in the Old Testament, adding the utterly inane comment, “It’s now 2019, we live in a civilized society, and it’s not the days of the Bible. I think God would actually be really cool about transgender people. If Jesus came back...he wouldn’t be changing wine into water [sic]; he’d be changing men into women, women into men, doing all of that.”

Behold the depth of intellectual discussion presented on British daytime television!

To answer Morgan and Willoughby, however, Mackereth, if he had been allowed to speak, could have explained the following. First, Morgan is conflating two things: the capital punishment of adulterers required under the Old Testament civil law, which punishment

applied only to those caught in the act of adultery, for no one was ever executed for a mere thought in the Old Testament; and the teaching of Christ concerning spiritual adultery in Matthew 5. Second, Morgan and Willoughby are ignorant of the fact that the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws were abolished because Christ, who is the substance of the law, fulfilled the shadows in His lifelong obedience, sufferings, and death on the cross, as passages such as Colossians 2:16-23 teach. Therefore, there is no longer any prohibition against eating shellfish, pork, or other meats that were unclean in the Old Testament, and, therefore, there is no contradiction in the Bible. Third, the New Testament church judges sins, even sins such as incest, which were capital crimes under the Mosaic Law, with the spiritual judgment of Christian discipline and excommunication (see I Cor. 5); therefore, it is grossly inaccurate to suggest that death by stoning is still required in the New Testament church. Fourth, when the Lord Jesus returns, He will raise the dead, transform our mortal bodies, judge all men and women, and make the new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells. All impenitent violators of the law will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And fifth, and finally, there is salvation full and free for all who turn from sin and find refuge, righteousness, and life in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Of course, such a message, which I can articulate without the pressure of appearing on television, and to which Dr. Mackereth witnessed admirably given the circumstances, is not welcome on “Good Morning Britain.”

Dr. Mackereth will have difficulty arguing his case, however, because his employers have cited the transgender guidelines of the Church of England to prove that the good doctor’s position is outside of the mainstream of Christianity. I do not know whether Mackereth is a member of the Church of England or not, but this is a disgraceful example of how the apostate church makes it much more difficult for Bible-believing Christians (that should be a redundancy, but since the Church of England claims to be Christian, sadly, it is not) to argue their position. I cite from the guidelines according to which the Church of England “welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the body of Christ” and even allows them to be baptized under their new name and gender:

If a transgender person is not already baptized, then baptism itself would be the natural liturgical context for recognizing and celebrating their identity in Christ and God’s love for them. Where such a person has already

been baptized, the House of Bishops commends the rite of Affirmation of Baptismal Faith as the central feature of any service to recognize liturgically a person's gender transition.

For a trans person to be addressed liturgically by the minister for the first time by their chosen name may be a powerful moment in the service. Some trans people may not wish their former name or gender to be mentioned. It should be noted that the giving or adoption of a new name has a long history in the Judeo-Christian tradition as may be evidenced from Scripture.¹

Tellingly, the Church of England appeals to the widely held belief that all people, whether believers or unbelievers, are in the image of God, for the document states, "The image of God, in which we are all made, transcends gender, race, and any other characteristic." But this is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that only believers are restored according to the image of God lost in the fall of Adam (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10),

When the culture adopts the madness of the transgender movement, and even the established Church of England conforms to the spirit of the age, Christians like Mackereth will increasingly find themselves an isolated and ostracized minority in the United Kingdom.

The author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* repudiates the Christian faith

Joshua Eugene Harris (b. 1974) was a leading figure in the "Christian Purity" movement. His father, Greg Harris, was a leader among Christian homeschoolers in the 1980s and 1990s, a movement that his son, Joshua, enthusiastically embraced. At the age of 17 Harris began to speak at his father's homeschooling events, and from 1994-1997 he published *New Attitude Magazine*, a resource for homeschooled teenagers. In 1997 without any formal theological training, Harris moved from Oregon to Maryland to place himself under the mentorship of Charles Joseph (C. J.) Mahaney, pastor of Covenant Life Church and Sovereign Grace Ministries. The same year, Harris published his bestseller *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. A year later, 1998, he married Shannon Boone with whom he has three children. His second book, *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship* (2000), recounts the history of his relationship with Shannon.

Harris served as senior pastor of Covenant Life Church from 2004 to 2015. In January 2015 he an-

nounced that he was stepping down from his pastoral role to pursue formal, theological training at Regent College, Vancouver:

In reflecting on my own story, I can't help but think that I have lived a sort of backwards life. Without meaning to, I have experienced life out of the normal order and sequence of events. At the end of last year I turned 40 years old. Yet it is only now that I am going to school. I haven't completed any post-graduate study. I don't even have an undergraduate degree. In fact, I have never attended a formal school full-time in my life.... Seven years after I arrived at the church I was set in as the hand picked replacement for C.J. I was 30 years old, with no formal theological training and no formal training in organizational leadership, and I was the Senior Pastor of a 3,000-member church. That, my friends, is a crazy, backwards life!²

In addition, sexual abuse allegations rocked Covenant Life Church and Sovereign Grace Ministries around that time, although no allegations were ever made against Harris. In 2014 a former member of Covenant Life Church was convicted of the sexual abuse of children, which crimes took place in the 1980s. Allegations brought in a civil suit against Mahaney and others, that the leadership had covered up the abuse, were dismissed by the Maryland Court of Appeals in June 2014.³ Nevertheless, Harris expressed misgivings in an interview that "the isolation of Covenant Life, and of a small cluster of churches of which it was a part, may have fed leadership mistakes, including the decision of pastors—himself among them—to handle a child sexual abuse case internally instead of going to police."⁴

In 2016 Harris released a statement in which he repudiated the core teachings of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* and the Christian purity culture it promoted, and apologized for the "hurt" it had caused. He followed that apology with a "Ted Talk" in 2017 and a contribution to a film "I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye" (2018). As Albert Mohler astutely observes, "The obvious question that arose from the film and from his statement in 2016 is what was left of Harris' understanding of sex, and for that matter, of Christianity?"⁵

The answer to that question came in July 2019 when Harris announced his separation and divorce from his wife Shannon. He followed that with a repudiation of

1 <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/Pastoral%20Guidance-Affirmation-Baptismal-Faith.pdf>.

2 https://www.covlife.org/blog/joshua_harris_sunday_remarks.

3 <https://caselaw.findlaw.com/md-court-of-special-appeals/1671245.html>.

4 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/long-an-outsider-popular-evangelical-pastor-heads-for-the-mainstream>.

5 <https://albertmohler.com/2019/08/01/joshua-harris>.

the Christian faith: “I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus,” he wrote. “The popular phrase for this is ‘deconstruction;’ the biblical phrase is ‘falling away.’ By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.”⁶ Finally, Harris “repented” of his Christianity, lamenting that his advocacy of Christian sexual ethics had hurt many people:

I have lived in repentance for the past several years—repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few. But I specifically want to add to this list now: to the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry.

⁶ <https://www.newsweek.com/josh-harris-not-christian-dating>.

Notice how Harris now equates Christianity with self-righteousness, not the truth of the grace of God, which excludes all self-righteousness. He also views Christianity as oppressive to women and LGBT people, as well as exclusionary and bigoted. Finally, Harris confirmed his newfound “tolerance” by attending a “Pride March” in Vancouver on (Sunday) August 4, and proudly sharing photos of himself wearing a T-shirt with the message “Love Is Great” while holding a rainbow donut.⁷

Harris should find the words of Hebrews 6:4-6 sober reading, as should we all:

It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

⁷ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/joshua-harris-marches-in-pride-parade-after-apologizing-to-lgbt-community.html>.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Observations calling for discernment

Previous article in this series: May 15, 2019, p. 373.

Ecclesiastes 10:18-20

Chapter 10 concludes with three further observations or warnings that we are called to ponder. They belong to the reality of life in a fallen world under the sun. They draw on the way of the fool in his walk and talk (Eccl. 10:12-15), that folly illustrated in the rulers among men (Eccl. 10:5, 6, 16, 17), and the inclination to folly rooted in the flesh (Eccl. 10:1, 2). These observations serve to summarize elements of the chapter and its lessons, call us to a certain measure of discernment over against folly and lead into the next chapter concerning our labor under God’s providence and the way of wisdom.

By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. (Eccl. 10:18)

The text draws a familiar picture of a building decaying and falling through. The rafters sag, the roof leaks, and the structure begins to fold in on itself. The old house or barn in the country, left and neglected, is such a building. Old buildings in the city are no different. The temple itself would need to be maintained and repaired in the course of its history. The reality in a fallen world is that moth and rust corrupt, so that all the works of men decline and decay.

The figure must first of all be taken in its plain sense. It is a calling to diligence in our earthly labor and toil, in the vanity of this world. Labor is required if the house is to be kept and maintained. The fool who strives against God's will ignores such warnings and folds his hands in idleness. Much slothfulness here is a pattern of indolence that will not lift the hands to the task and work. This is, spiritually, a striving with the curse of God upon a fallen creation. It is the walk of one who expects to prosper without work, seeks temporary pleasure as an end in itself in self-indulgence, and is devoid of discernment. Such a one runs on heedless of the ruin he brings upon himself and his house. The familiar judgment of God, in the curse upon the ground (Gen. 3:17-19), makes this life of indolent self-indulgence an unsustainable folly.

At the same time, the picture is also a figure that has broader implications. As it is with a building that must be maintained by much labor while much slothfulness destroys it, so also the life of the home, of marriage, of one's daily business, all require diligence. As the building decays, so does a household, a kingdom, and also the church. The kingdom, whose princes eat in the morning for drunkenness (Eccl. 10:16, 17), is a kingdom in decline, the house of that the kingdom will fall through. Where the keys of the kingdom are not faithfully exercised, the church will not prosper. Where spiritual diligence in the believer is not found in his spiritual life and the covenant home, he and his house will suffer from neglect.

All of the things to which the figure may apply involve the use of means, whether of grace or earthly tools. The use of these means is not automatic. They require care and attention of thought: study, labor, exertion and toil under the sun. They require diligence, whether it be putting a roof on a house, maintaining discipline in the home, order in the civil state, or preserving the heritage of the gospel unto the next generation in the church. The temptation of sin leads to the deceitful notion when things go well that we have arrived and can now let go and indulge ourselves. The Lord Himself, His judgment and providence, does not allow man to walk in idleness. Our calling is to labor while it is day, the more so as we know that we are stewards in every aspect of life, and that the Lord will come again (Matt. 24:42-51).

A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merriness: but money answereth all things. (Eccl. 10:19)

Labor and toil do not mean there is no place for rejoicing. Solomon has pointed out that we are to rejoice in our

own works (Eccl. 3:22), to take our portion from the labor of the day with thanksgiving and to eat and drink of it (Eccl. 5:18-20), to do so also with merry heart (Eccl. 8:15). The purpose of a feast is laughter and wine makes merry. God made it so. The use of these activities and things in their proper order with thanksgiving before God is itself a gift of God to the believer (Eccl. 5:19). They come by diligent labor under the sun.

Sin, however, corrupts the life of man so what is transitory or temporary, of feasting and rejoicing after labor, becomes a curse to him. Seeking feasting and wine as an end in themselves is destructive. The world lives for partying, for food and drink, for the pleasures of the moment. These become the goal of a man's life, like that of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-19), who would possess himself in idleness and pleasure. The idleness of rulers who eat and drink for drunkenness in the morning works the ruin of house of the kingdom. Seeking to dwell in the house of laughter is the folly of sin. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart" (Eccl. 7:2). Sin corrupts the good gifts of God, the use of them is not the problem, but the man who uses them in the service of sin.

Discernment in our labor and calling keeps these gifts of God in their proper place. They are the fruit of diligent labor and a transitory blessing. This is put in perspective in the latter part of the verse, "but money answereth all things." The contrast is between a feast and the money or the silver. The one is a fleeting thing, the other is an answer, a response, to all things, that is to all the things needful. Under the sun the fruit of our labor and increase, the resulting money, corresponds to all the needs of life. It is the means to meet those present needs.

The point has been made that covetousness, the heaping and gathering of riches, is bondage. The fool heaps and gathers, hoards his silver, without understanding its purpose or his own end. This has already been termed vanity. The love of money has been warned against (Eccl. 5:10). But it is the necessary fruit of labor and diligence. In its proper place, as a means to serve the needs of our earthly life under the sun, it is an answer to all those things. It is not the answer to life itself, for that is the fear of God. But it is a necessary servant that comes by way of hard work and toil.

The Scriptures promote neither idleness nor covetousness. All of our activity finds its central reference point in the service of God and thanksgiving for His gifts and the means of life under His providence. But that requires walking by faith under God's care: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not

thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Eccl. 11:6).

The Preacher has said, “for wisdom is a defence and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it (Eccl. 7:12). Money is a present defense, answering the needs of life under the sun. It cannot give life. Only grace in Christ, the knowledge of God by faith, does that. But money is a defense under the sun, addressing our present passing needs. It is a servant and not to be a master. It comes by way of diligent labor and toil in the things of this life, in our work and calling.

Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter. (Eccl. 10:19, 20)

The thought of verse 19 is still rooted in the design and government of God over all things. It is He who sets a king in power and gives riches unto men. It is God who ordains “the powers that be” (Rom. 13:1). At the same time, the text draws on the speech of the fool in contrast to the words of the wise (Eccl. 10:12, 13). Discontent with God’s way with us and covetousness leads to a spirit of rebellion and anger, with God’s disposition in the affairs of life. That wicked men rule, that the rich oppress the poor (Eccl. 5:5), that there is evil among “the powers that be” (Eccl.10:4-7), has already been addressed.

We have been warned, “Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken: lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou hast cursed others” (Eccl. 7:21, 22). In the mouth of the fool, “the beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk mischievous madness” (Eccl. 10:13). We are warned not only to heed not all that is spoken but to guard our own thoughts and tongue. To curse men in enmity is a striving with God’s providence.

There is a holy anger with sin, which is to be given over to God, that the sun go not down upon it (Eph. 4:26). God says “vengeance is mine: I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). But the curse in view here in Ecclesiastes 10:19 must be understood of a primarily sinful anger and its imprudent expression in both thought and word. The warning concerns yielding ourselves to such anger and its curse of others in private thought or uttering it in what we deem secret, the bedchamber.

The warning not to yield to this sinful impulse is needed. One’s attitude reflects his thought, and it works

its way out. The world around us is full of the raging speech of wicked and rebellious men, who curse their neighbor, their boss, the rulers and the rich. A curse is a word of power, a verdict. When God utters the curse, it works judgment. Man’s word is that of a creature. To curse thus is to usurp a divine prerogative, unless it be in the service of God which condemns what God condemns as anathema.

The text describes the imprudence of such a curse from its consequences, under God’s government “*a bird of the air shall [or may] carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter*” (Eccl. 10:20). Such cursing is not harmless venting. It is a foolish yielding to a sinful impulse. Given what has been said before, “for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou hast cursed others” (Eccl. 7:22), it is a sobering admonition.

We live in a world where men curse in their rage against one another, lie about their neighbor, and slander one another. The point of the text is that it will come back upon their own head. The way of wisdom is to flee from it. The bedchamber today is as much an email, or some other social media, as it is venting to one’s self when seemingly alone. Discernment guards us from the inherent folly of our own sinful tongue, and pulls us back from it. While present with us in our sinful flesh, our tongue is not to have dominion over us. This in part brings us again to the beginning of the chapter. “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour” (Eccl. 10:1).

The way of wisdom is to walk under God’s government, under His sovereign disposition in the affairs of men, and leave the rendering of judgment in God’s hands where it belongs:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed (I Pet. 2:21-24).

This involves humbling ourselves in repentance before God, seeking and putting away the impulses of the flesh and walking in newness of life.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

Tongue

Like the helm of a ship or a bit in the mouth of a horse, the tongue is a very little member (Jam. 3:3-5). Perhaps we are most conscious of our tongues when tasting a little food or drink, though we probably do not lap water with our tongues “as a dog lappeth,” as did the 300 soldiers of Gideon (Jud. 7:5). But it is especially in its capacity for language that the tongue “boasteth great things” (Jam. 3:5), even greater than steering the bulk of a ship or controlling a powerful horse. If you have ever used a glossary (derived from the Greek: *glossa*, “tongue”), then you know something of the arsenal wielded by the tongue. So much is the tongue bound up in all forms of human communication that the Bible speaks of the Hebrew tongue and the Greek tongue (Rev. 9:11), the tongue of the Chaldeans (Dan. 1:4), and the nations “whose tongue thou shalt not understand” (Deut. 28:49). A tongue cleaving to the roof of the mouth is a silent tongue, which the psalmist prayed would be his tongue “if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Ps. 137:6). The tongue of a man with a heart overflowing with the beauty of the King and His bride is “the pen of a ready writer” (Ps. 45:1).

As a vehicle for language, the tongue holds the capacity for tremendous evil. The wicked whose throat is an open sepulcher also “flatter with their tongue” (Ps. 5:9). They “whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words” (Ps. 64:3). The “tongue of the strange woman” lures many into her net of adultery and destruction (Prov. 6:24). Among six, yea seven abominations to the LORD is not only a proud look and hands that shed innocent blood, but also “a lying tongue” (Prov. 6:17). The wicked even dare to “set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth” (Ps. 73:9). No such affront against the God of glory shall remain unanswered, for “The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things” (Ps. 12:3)! Not even a drop of water shall be spared to cool the tongue of those cast into the consuming flame of eternal wrath (Luke 16:24).

But James was not thinking of the worldly wicked when he described the tongue as a fire. And not just any

fire, but “a world of iniquity, so is the tongue among our members” (Jam. 3:6). The wildfire that consumes bramble, houses, and forests compares nothing to the tongue that “is set on fire of hell.” Not trees, but brothers and sisters, living, breathing persons, fuel the flames of the unruly, untamable, poisonous tongue (Jam. 3:8). Before you open your mouth (or your inbox, or your phone, or your social media account) consider carefully, for “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). Rather, “keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Ps. 34:13).

But as terrifying as the potential for evil is, so thrilling are the possibilities for a good use of the tongue! “The tongue of the just is as choice silver” (Prov. 10:20) and, though some speak like the piercings of a sword, “the tongue of the wise is health” (Prov. 12:18). More persuasive than abrupt and sharp words, “a soft tongue breaketh the bone” (Prov. 25:13). More thrilling yet is the use of the tongue in the worship of most holy God! The living vow of the believer is, “And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long” (Ps. 35:28). And why should it not, when the Lord has filled our mouth with laughter “and our tongue with singing” (Ps. 126:2)?

The Lord God Himself has a tongue. No more than we can see the hand of God that upholds and governs the universe can we see the tongue of the LORD when “his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire” (Is. 30:27). But even as the Lord took on human hands by which He placed His healing touch on the ears and tongue of the deaf and dumb man in Decapolis (Mark 7:31), so He assumed a human tongue of His own. Indeed, it was the will of the LORD God to give Jesus “the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Is. 50:4). In His darkest hours on the cross He cried, “my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (Ps. 22:15). But rising from the dead and ascending to the heavens, Christ has been given a name above every name, “that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

Now in the Old Testament it was only the prophet who could say, “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (II Sam. 23:2). But when cloven tongues of fire rested visibly above the heads of 120 believers, filled with the Holy Ghost they “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:3, 4). So it began in Jerusalem that Parthians, Medes, Elamites and many others declared in amazement, “We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). And from heaven the ever-growing multitude continues to sing its new song to the Lamb, “Thou art worthy to

take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

So whether like Moses you are “of a slow tongue” (Ex. 4:10) or “of a stammering tongue” (Is. 33:19), or whether you have been given “the tongue of the wise” (Prov. 15:2), take heed to your ways that you sin not with your tongue (Ps. 39:1), keep in your tongue “the law of kindness” (Prov. 31:26) and let your “tongue also talk of [God’s] righteousness all the day long” (Ps. 71:24).



Taking heed to the doctrine

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Revelation, inspiration, and infallibility (27) The Spirit’s work of illumination

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2019, p. 303.

In our last article, we introduced the final important truth with regard to Holy Scripture that we intend to consider in this series: the Spirit’s work of illumination. Among all the other works of the Holy Spirit in connection with Scripture is the Spirit’s work of illumination. This is the Spirit’s work in the believer that results in the opening of his eyes and enlightening his understanding. The fruit of this work of the Spirit is that the child of God receives Holy Scripture as the Word of God. It is also the fruit of the work of illumination that the believer understands the content of God’s Word, understands it not only intellectually, but spiritually. He understands its many parts—books, chapters, verses, and parts of verses. And he understands its central message—the gospel of God’s grace in His Son, Jesus Christ, which is the golden thread that runs through Scripture. All this belongs to the Spirit’s work of illumination.

It does not take the Holy Spirit or the grace of God to understand the Scriptures intellectually. Even the devil and wicked men are able to understand the Scriptures in this way. They are able to discern Scripture’s meaning. The devil made this plain when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He quoted Scripture to the Lord, though he misinterpreted and misapplied what he quoted. That is inevitably the outcome. But the point is that he knew Scripture and “believed” Scripture (James 2:19). But he did not really know Scripture nor really believe the

Word of God. His deliberate twisting of God’s Word is the evidence of the fact that he was not illuminated by the Spirit. He did not understand Scripture with the spiritual understanding of true faith, which is the fruit of the Spirit’s work of illumination.

Last time, we ended by considering the necessity of the Spirit’s work of illumination, which necessity is the total depravity of the natural man. We also took note of certain Scripture passages that speak of the Spirit’s work of illumination. In this article, we begin by calling attention to the teaching of the Reformed confessions and Reformed theologians regarding illumination.

The Reformed confessions on illumination

Although illumination is not a truth that is developed to a great extent in the Reformed confessions, it is a truth clearly taught.

In the first section of the Belgic Confession, the first seven articles deal with the truth of the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture. In Article 5, entitled “From Whence the Holy Scriptures Derive their Dignity and Authority,” reference is made to the Spirit’s work of illumination. The article teaches that the dignity and authority of Scripture does not rest on the reception and approval of the church, but is due to the fact that “the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves.”

The article concludes with this statement: “For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.” The “very blind” are able to perceive and receive the Holy Scriptures, because the Holy Ghost witnesses in their hearts. That is what is meant by the Spirit’s work of illumination.

Mention is also made of the Spirit’s work of illumination in the Canons of Dort. Though implied in other articles, specific reference is made to this work of the Holy Spirit in Canons III/IV, Article 11. The Holy Spirit does not only direct the progress of the preaching of the gospel, “causing the gospel to be externally preached,” but He “powerfully illuminates their minds,” that is, the minds of the elect, so that “they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God.” This is a very clear reference to the work of the Spirit in connection with Holy Scripture. The Spirit “powerfully illuminates” the minds of the people of God—only of the people of God. This work of the Spirit is clearly a work of the Spirit in and upon the elect people of God. It is not a general work of the Spirit in all who read or have the Scriptures authoritatively preached to them—a common-grace work of the Holy Spirit. Absolutely not. This is a work of grace, the only kind of grace there is, saving grace. It is the Spirit’s work of illumination in those whom God has chosen.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 6 makes reference to this gracious work of the Holy Spirit. The paragraph begins by establishing the sufficiency of Holy Scripture:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

But immediately the Westminster divines added: “Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word....” The “saving understanding” of Holy Scripture, in distinction from a purely intellectual understanding, depends on “the inward illumination of the Spirit of God.” Apart from the Spirit’s inward illumination, there cannot be any “saving understanding” of the Word of God.

Calvin on illumination

In his writings the Reformer John Calvin refers frequently to the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination as,

for example, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7.4. He begins this section by insisting that “the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.” Addressing specifically the necessity of the witness of the Holy Spirit,” he says that

[i]f we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences—that they may not be perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation, and that they may not also boggle at the smallest quibbles—we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgment, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit.

A bit later, Calvin says:

Since for unbelieving men religion seems to stand by opinion alone, they, in order not to believe anything foolishly or lightly, both wish and demand rational proof that Moses and the prophets spoke divinely. But I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded. Isaiah very aptly expresses this connection in these words: “My Spirit which is in you, and the words that I have put in your mouth, and the mouths of your offspring, shall never fail” (Is. 59:21).

In the next section of the *Institutes*, 1.7.5, Calvin once again underscores the necessity of illumination. He teaches the necessity of illumination in connection with Scripture’s self-authentication—another of the important principles of the Reformation. Says Calvin:

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. For even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else’s judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men.

That which Calvin taught in the *Institutes* concerning the Spirit’s work of illumination, he also taught in other of his writings. Commenting on one of the clas-

sic passages on Scripture's inspiration, II Timothy 3:16, Calvin says:

Moses and the prophets did not utter rashly and at random what we have received from them, but, speaking by God's impulse, they boldly and fearlessly testified the truth that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke through them. The same Spirit who made Moses and the prophets so sure of their vocation now also bears witness to our hearts that He has made use of them as ministers by whom to teach us. Thus it is not surprising that many should doubt the authority of Scripture. For although the majesty of God is displayed in it, only those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to see what should have been obvious to all, but is in fact visible only to the elect.... [W]e owe to the Scripture the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in Him and has nothing of human origin mixed in it.

Implications of the doctrine of illumination

Several important implications are to be derived from the biblical truth of illumination and ought to be noted.

First, the Spirit's work of illumination is an aspect of the Spirit's work of regeneration. Regeneration precedes illumination; a man must be made alive before he is able to see and to understand. A dead man does not see and cannot know. What is true naturally is also true spiritually. First a person must receive new life, spiritual life, the life of Christ. Then, with his spiritual eyes and mind, he is able to see and to understand.

This underscores that the Spirit's work of illumination, like all His work in the child of God, is a gracious work. No man deserves this work of the Spirit. No man does anything to merit this work of the Spirit. No man by nature desires this work of the Spirit. The Spirit's work of illumination is a free and gracious work of the Spirit in the dead sinner. Jesus had this work of the Spirit in mind when He said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Second, the Spirit's work of illumination belongs to the broader work of the Spirit in sanctification. Sanctification is that work of the Spirit according to which He breaks in us the power of sin and works holiness in us. Included in the sanctifying work of the Spirit is His work of illumination. Sanctification is the broader work of the Spirit; illumination is His narrower work. At the same time, all whom the Spirit sanctifies, He does also illuminate. None who are sanctified are devoid of the illuminating work of the Spirit. Although one person may have a broader and deeper understanding of the

Word of God than another, all do share an understanding of the fundamental truths of the gospel, as they are set forth in sacred Scripture.

In the third place, the Spirit's work of illumination is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. This is true of sanctification generally, in distinction from justification, that it is an ongoing work of God in the elect believer. What is true of sanctification in general, is true of illumination specifically. The child of God must have his mind and eyes opened not just once but all his life-long. As we continue to read, study, meditate on, teach and apply the Word of God, we stand in need of the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. That is implied, for example, in the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 119:18, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." The psalmist was a believer, a child of God, one whose mind and eyes have already been opened. His prayer to God is not that for the first time his eyes may be opened so that he may behold wonderful things out of God's Word. The earlier verses of the psalm make plain that the psalmist is a believing child of God already, a believer who has been living out of his faith and enduring persecution for doing so. His prayer to God is that the Holy Spirit will *continue* to open his eyes so that he may *continue* to behold wonderful things out of God's Word. The very fact that he refers to God's Word as "wondrous" implies that he has already read and knows the Word of God. Having read and known God's Word, he declares that it is wondrous.

What this also points out is the important truth that the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit takes place *by means of prayer*. The psalmist in Psalm 119 is *praying* for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. And since the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 45, Q&A 116 is true, that God is pleased to give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who ask them of Him and are thankful for them, God hears the prayer of the psalmist, and hears our prayers as well. He answered the psalmist's prayer for illumination by continuing to work by His Spirit in the psalmist so that he continued to "behold wondrous things" out of God's holy Word. And so God does for all His children.

This makes clear how closely prayer and the understanding of God's Word are related. This is practical—very practical. If we desire to understand God's Word and to understand it properly, we must beseech God in prayer for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. And if we do not, God will not continue to open our eyes so that we behold wondrous things out of His Word. Especially is there a warning here for ministers of the gospel, who handle the Word of God in an especially intimate way. This indicates what may be the

cause at times of our not understanding, our struggles to understand, and even our misunderstanding of the Word of God: We have not been praying as we should be praying for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. We have ignored the Holy Spirit and failed to beseech God for His grace and Holy Spirit. And the result is that we misunderstand or even corrupt the teaching of God's Word. There is a warning here for pastors, for elders, for parents, for Christian school teachers—for us all.

It is significant that in the prayer of the Reverend Balthasar Lydius, in the worship service preceding the Synod of Dordt, Lydius made special supplication for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the delegates to the synod.

The Holy Scripture must be interpreted by that same

Spirit by which it was inspired, and cannot be understood except by pure minds. Therefore, we pray that Thou wilt first cleanse our intentions, then illumine us so that we may indeed understand Thy holy Word and handle it diligently. Grant, O God, that through the Scripture we may mislead no one, nor be misled, but that in it we may seek and find truth. Having discovered the truth, may we defend it with steadfast faith.

Lydius was only repeating in his own words the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 119:18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." May we make the psalmist's prayer for illumination our own, as well. And may we pray it sincerely and fervently.



Strength of youth

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of the Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana

The seventh commandment and the married life

A couple articles ago we considered the prohibition of the seventh commandment as it applies to pornography. The instruction given there, although specifically addressing pornography, can be broadened to include any sexual sin. In the last article we examined the positive requirement of the seventh commandment for those who are unmarried, using three "Cs" to fill that out: Christ, Chastity, and Care. This time we again take that positive approach, but will study the requirement of the seventh commandment for those who are *married*. As you might expect, the focus will be upon the sexual relationship between a husband and wife in marriage.

The subject is the positive requirement of the seventh commandment for those who are *married*. "Marriage?" you say. "That doesn't apply to me." But this *does* apply to you, young man or young woman. Even if you are not dating right now, it might be God's will that you do marry someday. Perhaps others of you are currently dating. And some of you, a little older, might already be married. No matter your age or circumstances, the subject of thankful obedience to the seventh commandment in marriage is always important.

The subject is the *positive* requirement of the sev-

enth commandment for those who are married. Perhaps this positive approach is not taken as often as it should be. There are reasons for this. It could be that there is a focus only on the "do nots" both before and within marriage, such as avoiding unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, and desires; the positive side is not sufficiently brought out. It could also be that we are embarrassed to broach this rather uncomfortable subject, especially because the world has so twisted it. But we must recognize that there is a full and rich life to which God calls us in marriage! Fallen, sinful man perverts sex—and we are no different by nature. But the grace of our Lord Jesus restores in the elect believer a proper attitude toward sex. In a world that seems to be screaming its perverse and foul teachings louder and louder every day, we must not only issue the warnings, but also faithfully and soberly teach the rightful and beautiful place that sex has within marriage.

Young people, the seventh commandment, and marriage

Concerning young people, the seventh commandment, and marriage, two comments are to be made.

First, we must not be under the impression that sex is *the* thing in marriage. The sexual relationship is *an* element in marriage, and an important one, but not the only element. For young people to have the marriage bed as their singular focus in dating and preparation for marriage is an imbalanced and dangerous view. There are other crucial aspects of marriage to take into consideration, the chief of which is that one marries in the Lord.

Second, having this balanced view on sex and marriage, young people should live their single years with an eye to this beautiful, intimate relationship in marriage. This must be heard in our world of so much immorality. Young man, in a culture where fornication is advertised around every corner, save yourself for your wife! Young woman, in a society where sexual temptations bombard you in many areas, remember the husband to whom you will give yourself someday! Furthermore, not all Christians have the gift of sexual self-control—those who do not have this gift ought to marry. The apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 7:8, 9, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” That is, if the unmarried cannot contain sexually, it is better to marry than to burn in sexual desire. Neither is this idea “below” our Marriage Form, which is a faithful summary of Scripture’s teaching on marriage: “But that you may live godly in this state [of marriage], you must know the reasons wherefore God hath instituted the same... That each of them [husband and wife], avoiding all uncleanness and evil lusts, may live with a good and quiet conscience. For, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband (I Cor. 7:2).”

All of this being said, it is a reality that some will remain unmarried for many years, if not their whole life. Sometimes it is God’s will that someone who *desires* to be married remains single for all the years of his or her life. If such should be the case, God will give grace so that the believer is able to ‘contain,’ to use the language of I Corinthians 7. Also, the single must never forget what he or she *does* enjoy: the intimate, warm covenant friendship of God in Christ.

A stunning portrait

What, then, does the Bible teach about the positive aspect of the seventh commandment as it relates to marriage? We turn our attention, without any embarrassment, to the rich and beautiful portrait of the sexual relationship between husband and wife in Proverbs 5.

First, the enjoyment and satisfaction of marriage to one’s wife is in view. Marriage is described for us

in verse 15 using a figure: “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.” The cistern or well is the wife. Drinking water out of the cistern or well is the enjoyment and satisfaction of marriage to one’s wife. The husband drinks deeply of that water in his marriage: the water is satisfying and refreshing, just like any drink of water is; this water enjoyed within marriage is not defiled.

The enjoyment of marriage to one’s wife is further described in verse 19: “Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.” Let her be as the loving hind—a variety of deer, a doe. Just as the deer is beautiful and lovely, so the wife. Let her be as the pleasant roe—the female mountain goat, which is graceful and elegant, as the wife is. Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times—a graphic description of the undefiled marriage bed. The danger is always that a husband would pervert such a text to mean he may treat his wife as an object for the satisfying of his selfish pleasures (or that a wife would similarly mistreat her husband). That must not be. Rather, described here is a husband who tenderly and selflessly loves his wife and seeks her good in all of marriage, including their relationship of intimacy. He is *ravished* always with her love: the husband is intoxicated or exhilarated with the love of his wife!

What Proverbs 5 teaches here is nothing less than the love for the neighbor God requires. It is the husband’s love for his nearest neighbor, his wife; and the wife’s love for her nearest neighbor, her husband. It is a deep love for one’s spouse that is rooted in love for God.

Second, this enjoyment and satisfaction is to be found *only* in marriage to one’s wife. Proverbs 5:15 makes that plain: “Drink waters out of *thine own* cistern, and running waters out of *thine own* well.” It is sin for this love to be expressed outside the marriage bond. It is proper and good that this love be expressed within the marriage bond. The wife is the singular focus of the husband, and he loves her alone; the same applies to the wife toward her husband.

Why the stress upon the husband’s devotion *exclusively* to his wife? The strange woman lurks. The first half of Proverbs 5 informs us of this strange woman and warns us sharply concerning her; verses 3, 4, and 8 are a sampling: “For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house....” These verses are the background of the pointed question in verse 20: “And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?” Young man,

why would you be intoxicated with the love of *another* woman outside your marriage, going after her on the computer, on the phone, or in your thoughts? God has given you the wife of your youth—be ravished with *her* love, in thankfulness to the God of your salvation!

Third, what Proverbs 5 says so frankly and beautifully about marriage must be read side by side with Ephesians 5:25-28:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

We lift our eyes to this lofty spiritual reality. Husbands love and give themselves for their wives, conscious of the spiritual reality to which marriage points: Christ and His church! The sexual union in marriage reflects the intimacy of the union of Christ and the church. The sexual relationship of a husband and wife also points to the intense love that the Savior has for His church, and the love of the church for Christ in response. Also, the husband's (and wife's) conduct in marriage is a matter of gratitude to the complete and loving Savior.

Young men and women, study this beautiful portrait. It is my prayer, the prayer of your parents, and the prayer of many, that you would live your single years, your dating years, and your married years conscious of this portrait, in gratitude to God.



Go ye into all the world

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

An exciting venture in the Philippines: A PRCP seminary

Earlier this year my wife and I enjoyed an extended furlough in the USA. In the course of visiting our churches, giving presentations at our schools, and discussing with many of you our labors in the Philippines, I was asked numerous questions (and good ones, I might add) about the plans for and work toward the start of a seminary in the Philippines. These questions indicated, first of all, a lively interest in and support for this significant development in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP). It is indeed a large undertaking for this small denomination. But they and we are excited about it and thankful for the Lord's blessing which enables such a work to begin. However, the many questions that were asked also indicated that many of you are wondering about the details of the seminary. The hope is that this article will help answer many of those questions.

When will the seminary begin?

Seminary classes began already on Tuesday, August 13. In anticipation of that significant day in the history of the PRCP, the denomination's Theological School Committee sent a special request to each of the four churches asking that "the Consistories of the PRCP hold

one worship service on August 11, 2019 dedicated to the beginning of the seminary school and entrusting our school to the blessing and care of our Sovereign God, and asking our pastors to preach texts related to the ministry of the Word and seminary instruction." The goal of providing seminary instruction to Filipinos in the Philippines is something that has been in the works for many years. Both the PRCP and we as missionaries are convinced it is best to train the men here in the Philippines itself, so that the students can remain in their home country, their own culture, their home churches, with their families, etc. We are thankful the Lord has now made it a reality.

How many students are there?

We have one student enrolled in the first year of seminary classes (the 2019-2020 school year). We also anticipate more students being ready for seminary in our second year of operation (the 2020-2021 school year). And there are other young men in high school or in college who could be students in the future. We are thankful for God's provision of all these young men.

Does the PRCP need so many ministers? That is, will there be places for each of these men to labor when, the Lord willing, they graduate?

Yes, for the PRCP is in urgent need of men for the gospel ministry. Currently, the denomination has four congregations (Berean PRC, the PRC in Bulacan, Maranatha PRC, and Provident PRC) plus a mission field (the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte). That's five pastors that are needed. At this time the denomination has only three pastors, and one of them is already in his mid-70s. Thus, there are currently two vacancies, and there could be a third in the near future. In addition to that, the individual churches of the PRCP have a significant amount of outreach work, and any of these contacts could develop into a place of labor for a PRCP missionary or pastor. What is true in the PRCA is also true in the PRCP: The harvest is plenteous, and the laborers are few.

Do the PRCP students need to fulfill certain pre-seminary requirements?

Already back in 2016 the PRCP Classis adopted a pre-seminary program. That program of study spells out that prospective students need to attain a college degree (a BA or BS), and that they must include certain courses in that degree. One thing that they must include is two years of Advanced English. The latter is necessary not only because the instruction (for now) will be given in English, but also because most Reformed literature is available today only in the English language.

Where will the seminary be located?

The PRCP Classis decided to use, for now, the church building of Provident PRC in Marikina. This building should serve us well, since it has a number of rooms, whiteboards, projector screens, tables and chairs, etc. The building is also easily accessible by public transportation. And if they so desire, the students should be able to find reasonably priced housing not too far from Provident. For ourselves, it takes us about 45 minutes to travel from our homes to Provident's building. One more thing, and that is that the Classis also decided that in the future the Berean PRC's building, when it has been prepared for this use, could become the new and more permanent location for the seminary.

Who will give the instruction? Will you missionaries be professors?

At the request of the PRCP's Classis, the three PRCA missionaries will, for now, provide the instruction. This does not mean, however, that we will be professors.

None of us three has been called to be nor installed as a professor. Rather, our role as missionaries is to provide assistance to the PRCP in this significant work of training men for the gospel ministry. The fact that we are merely assisting the PRCP in this fits in with the fact that the seminary is not our seminary, nor a transplant of the PRCA seminary, but the seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. Thus, while the PRCP awaits the time when she will be able to call her own men to serve as professors, we have been asked to be the instructors. We count that a privilege. And it is our hope that the PRCP will be able one day to call and install her own men as seminary professors. That may be some years away, but that is our goal, and theirs.

What subjects will be taught in the seminary, and how many years will the seminary program be?

The PRCP Classis decided on a course of study that is very similar to what is provided in the PRCA's theological school. One significant difference is that whereas Greek is a *pre-seminary* subject in the PRCA, it will be a *seminary* subject in the PRCP. The main reason for this is that the students have been unable to find a good Greek course in colleges or other seminaries here in the Philippines. The seminary program will also include a six-month internship. Because of the inclusion of Greek and also an internship in the seminary program, the whole seminary course will most likely be four and a half years.

Which subjects will each of you missionaries be teaching?

The subjects that have been assigned to us for the first two years of seminary instruction are as follows: Rev. R. Smit will teach Greek, Dogmatics, and New Testament Exegesis; Rev. D. Holstege will teach Hermeneutics and New Testament Isagogics; Rev. D. Kleyn will teach Church History, Homiletics, Old Testament Isagogics, and Hebrew. The reason why Rev. Holstege is not teaching as many courses is because currently he is also pastoring a vacant PRCP congregation (Provident PRC). Some of the above might change as we go along, depending on our relative workloads, the number of students in any given school year, our furloughs, and so on. But for now those are our assigned classes for the first two years.

Will others be able to sit in on the seminary classes?

Many members of the churches have expressed a keen interest in attending the classes, even though they do

not plan to pursue the ministry. And so the plan is to open up some of the classes to visitors. The courses that will be open to visitors in the first year are Dogmatics, Hermeneutics, and Church History. We trust this will benefit those members, and thus also the churches.

Has any thought been given to this seminary being used to train students for the ministry from other countries in Southeast Asia?

Yes, this idea has certainly been considered, not only by us here in the Philippines, but also by our Foreign Mission Committee. However, since we are at the beginning stages of the seminary, and because the need in the Philippines itself is so great, our focus for now will be on training Filipinos for the gospel ministry. But once the seminary is up and running, so to speak, then we should be able again to explore the idea of having students come here from other Southeast Asian

countries. Some of our denomination's contacts in other Asian countries have already expressed an interest in that. We trust that it will be possible in the future, the Lord willing.

Hopefully this provides a helpful overview of what the PRCP, with our help, has now undertaken for the training of men for the gospel ministry. The work before the denomination and before us as missionaries is daunting. But we are confident of the Lord's guidance and blessing. We thank our PRCA denomination for her faithful support of us as missionaries (and our families) so that such a significant work can be undertaken. And we covet your continued prayers. May God be pleased to bless and prosper this work so that the urgent need for Filipino pastors and missionaries can be met in the years to come.

“Brethren, pray for us.” (I Thess. 5:25)



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Can you name the students in our Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary? Answer later in this column.

Sister-church activities

The installation of Rev. Vernon Ibe as missionary-pastor to the fellowship in Albuera, Leyte is scheduled for November 17, 2019 at 3 P.M., at PRC in Bulacan, the Lord willing.

Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Edgerton, MN PRC hosted a speech Friday, September 20, with Rev. Matthew De Boer giving the speech on witnessing.

First PRC of Holland, MI planned a presentation they named “Living and Dying Happily” on September 25.

The Evangelism Committee of Peace PRC in Dyer, IN invited all to their fall lecture held Friday, September 13. Pastor Barnhill gave a lecture titled “Interpreting Genesis 1–3: Two Houses, Two Foundations,” held in their new Dyer location.

Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL is holding its annual Reformation Day Lecture on Friday, October 11 at 7:30 P.M. Prof. Russell Dykstra will be speaking on the subject: “Peace for Troubled Times.” The topic is relevant and we expect and hope for a good crowd of listeners!

Denominational activities

Classis East met on Wednesday, September 11th at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, while Classis West met Wednesday, September 25 at Calvary PRC in Hull, IA. We are thankful that God uses these assemblies and the delegates for the good of our churches. Both bodies faced lengthy agendas, perhaps making for extended meetings.

Rev. Gise Van Baren was taken by God to glory on August 31. Rev. Van Baren, age 87, had served congregations in Doon, IA; Randolph, WI; First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI; Hudsonville, MI; and Loveland, CO before becoming emeritus in 1999. We are thankful to God for this faithful servant who was used to edify God's people for almost 40 years! Rev. Van Baren officiated at this writer's baptism as minister in Doon.

The synodical Contact Committee of our churches has formed a delegation to visit the BERG (Confessing Evangelical Reformed Church) in Germany. Rev. Cory Griess, along with Rev. Clay Spronk (Faith PRC) and elder Pete VanDerSchaaf (Faith PRC) plan to leave September 30 and return October 14. May God care for them in their travels and in the work.

The consistory of Pittsburgh, PA PRC approved the request of our denomination's Contact Committee to allow Pastor Wilbur Bruinsma to attend NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) again this year as an observer from our churches. This meeting will be held in Anaheim, CA on November 12-14. Pastor Ken Koole, who will be the other attendee, has consented to preach for the congregation in Pittsburgh on the following Sunday, November 17th.

Seminarian activities

On September 1 Candidate Jacob Maatman accepted the call extended to him by Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. He was examined at the meeting of Classis East on September 11 and ordained on September 27.

Also on September 1 Candidate Matt Kortus accepted the call extended to him by Hope PRC of Redlands, CA. He was examined at the meeting of Classis West on September 25 and is scheduled to be ordained on October 4.

We are glad that God has provided places in these congregations for these young men to labor in the Word and sacraments! And we are happy for the saints in these congregations that their prayers for a pastor have been answered.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in Lacombe, AB, Canada as their congregation remains vacant and continues to call for a minister.

Young people's activities

Advance notice: The 2020 PR Young People's Convention, hosted by Georgetown PRC, is planned for August 10-14 at Lake Williamson in Carlinville, IL.

Congregational activities

There's an interesting activity taking place in First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI. It's called LOFT (Ladies of First Together)! This group was formed by the Helping Hands committee in 2017. Every six months ladies (post-high and up) are put together in groups of 3 or more, with the goal of helping participants get to know one another more. There are no set rules or objectives. Each group decides what is best for them. LOFT allows participants to get out of their comfort zones and build

relationships with other women. This sounds like an interesting way to promote unity and delight in the communion of the saints!

Missionary activities

Rev. Daniel Holstege and Rev. Daniel Kleyn have preached in the Bearers of Light Community Church in the Guiguinto area of the Philippines in the recent past. On August 25 Rev. Holstege led the congregation in their first *Reformed* worship service. Here's his account of that occasion:

Last Sunday went well at Guiguinto. After teaching Lord's Day 7 on true faith, I led them in a worship service. I did not yet pronounce the benediction, but prayed for God's blessing, as a seminarian would do. Then I followed the ordinary order of worship at Provident PRC: Psalter, Ten Commandments, Psalter, Prayer, Psalter, Scripture (Psalm 96), Sermon (vv. 1-2), Prayer, Psalter, Doxology 196. We donated 15 new Psalters, as per the usual practice with a new group. We also gave them copies of the new Tagalog translation of the Heidelberg Catechism. Bro Jun Armas accompanied me (a deacon from Provident) and ran the equipment for musical accompaniment. It was a new experience for them, so they struggled a bit with the singing. I chose what I thought were easy ones: 1, 53, 325, and 257. But they were all brand new to them! That's why I preached a sermon on "Sing a New Song to Jehovah." I preached in some Tagalog, some English.

Another door might be opening in the Philippines!

Trivia answer

There are currently six students in our seminary in Wyoming, MI. Four are first-year students and include: Doner Bartolon, First PRC (married with 2 children); Jeremy Helms, Georgetown PRC (married); Matt Koerner, Southeast PRC (single); Isaac Peters, Launceston EPCA, Tasmania; (married with 4 children). There is one second-year student, Marcus Wee from the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (married with their second child due in September). And there is one fourth-year student, Josiah Tan, who is enrolled in a special five-year program. Mr. Tan is also from CERC in Singapore and is married with two children. May God bless these young men in their formal training! More trivia next time.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Announcements

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Reformed Witness Hour

Revs. W. Bruinsma

- October 6—"The Woman Eve"
Genesis 2:23, 24; 3:20
- October 13—"The Faith of Sarah"
Hebrews 11:11, 12
- October 20—"Rebekah Marries Isaac"
Genesis 24:55-67
- October 27—"Shiphrah and Puah Fear God"
Exodus 1:14-21

Reformation Lecture

Prof. Barrett Gritters will speak on:
*"Evangelicals and Catholics Together?
Reconciling the Unreconcilable"*

Friday, October 25, 2019 at 7:30 P.M.
at Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church
4515 Green Acres Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49009

Bound volumes

This is the first issue of Volume 96. If you would like to have your own volume 95 *SB* copies bound, please bring them to the office of the RFPA by October 15.