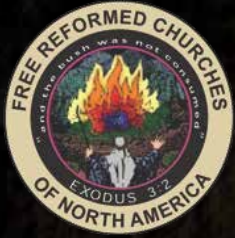


THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



He
IS NOT HERE:
FOR HE IS
Risen
AS HE SAID.

MATTHEW 28:6A

02 MEDITATION:
JESUS TRIUMPHS
ON GOLGOTHA

04 EDITORIAL:
REMEMBER THE YEARS OF
GOD'S RIGHT HAND (2)

18 PRACTICAL:
LISTENING TO WHAT
IS NOT SAID (2)



JESUS TRIUMPHS ON GOLGOTHA

“... he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” John 19:30b

In the past passion weeks, a lot of attention has been given to the suffering and death of Christ. When we think of suffering and death in general, these tend to be times of discouragement, setback, disappointment, and resignation. For the disciples and others who followed Christ, these descriptions may reflect something of their perception of the death of their Lord and Master. Yet, when we consider the suffering and death of Christ from His perspective, we see something very different. Instead of setback, there is advance, and instead of resignation, there is a willing acceptance of what lay before Him. All this climaxes with His cry on the cross, “It is finished.”

Powerfully

As we come to this point of Christ’s suffering and death, we must remember that Jesus had been through an incredibly difficult 24 hours. In the evening before, He had laid in the dirt, sweating drops of blood as He considered the cup of God’s wrath and felt the shame of sin and the weight of God’s wrath which awaited Him. He had endured the betrayal of Judas, the abandonment by the eleven disciples, the denial of Peter, and the humiliation and injustice of the trials before the High Priest, Pilate, and Herod. Then He endured the agony of being scourged and crucified, the agonies of Hell, and the withdrawal of the loving presence of His Father.

But now we hear Jesus say, “It is finished.” Jesus did not mumble or whisper this word. He does not say, “I am finished,” as we sometimes might say, “I am beat, I’m tired, I can’t go on anymore.” This is also not a cry of frustration, “That’s it, I’m done with this, figure it out on your own.” No, here Jesus, having his dry mouth moistened with the vinegar, cries with a loud voice, “It is finished!” What a startling cry this must have been for those who were there. What is finished? What has been completed? What is Jesus referring to?

Vitally

These three little words (which are only one word in Greek) tell us so much. This is a cry of victory and triumph. Jesus is telling us that His work has been completed. Of primary importance is the reality that Jesus had finished His work of satisfying God’s justice for the sins of all the elect.

This is what we tend to think of when we hear these words on the cross, but there are other things which Christ has also com-

pleted, like the work of keeping God’s law. Throughout all His lifetime, He continually and fully loved God with all His heart, soul, mind and strength, and He loved His neighbour as Himself. This is the righteousness believers receive from Christ when they put their trust in Him.

Jesus had also fulfilled the Mosaic types and shadows. His sacrifice fulfilled all that the Old Testament sacrifices represented. He also fulfilled many prophecies which pointed to His incarnation, suffering, and death. Think back to Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” In His suffering and death, the heel of Jesus had certainly been bruised, but while His heel was being bruised, He was crushing the head of Satan. While God still allows Satan to oppose the kingdom of heaven, this war has already been won. What a vital triumph!

Wondrously

Notice here that Jesus did not say, “It’s almost finished, there are just one or two sins left for which I have not yet paid.” No, He says, “It is finished.” This is such good news for us, because if we had to contribute anything, then we would be eternally lost. All our best works are like filthy rags! Even believers find pride, self-promotion, mixed motives, and lukewarmness in the good that they do. But, as article 21 of the Belgic Confession puts it, “Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever.” How we ought to thank God that Christ has done it all; He has completed the work that was set before Him. What confidence we as believers can have in the complete work of Christ!

We also know that Christ could not have been mistaken when He said, “It is finished.” In a family, there are times when children are told to clean up their room or some other part of the house, and after a while they come back and say, “We are done.” Their mom might ask, “Are you sure?” and they say, “Yes.” But as mom walks around to double check, she might say “Look you missed this over here, and I still see a toy under your bed. Please finish your work.” It is easy for us to miss things or to make mistakes, but we know that Christ did not make any mistakes in his life or on the cross. He hung there as the perfectly obedient Son of God. Not only did Christ fully complete His work, but God the Father was the one who laid on Christ all the sins of His people. It is impossible that God the Father would have made a mistake, that He would have overlooked or forgotten some sin. In all this we can have confidence that when Jesus said, “It is finished,” it truly was finished!

If you are still living without a Saviour, then this Jesus Christ, who cried out, “It is finished,” is exactly the Saviour you need. One of the first things God’s children learn is that they cannot save themselves or contribute anything to their salvation. Can you think of anyone else who perfectly lived the life you are required to live, and who died the death you must but dare not die? There is no other religion, no other gospel that offers such a perfect Saviour with a fully accomplished salvation. There is nothing you need to do before coming to Him. You do not need to try to first clean up your life. You do not need to prove how sincere you are before you come. Christ, who came to seek and save sinners, who offered Himself up as the perfect and complete sacrifice, calls you to believe in Him, to come to Him, and to cling to this crucified Savior as your only hope and comfort for life and death.

As you hear this cry of Jesus, “It is finished,” hear the contrast between His death and the suffering and death of the multitudes of this world. The watching crowds and Jewish rulers thought they had won by finally getting rid of Jesus, but all the while Christ was finishing His earthly task. What a Saviour we have! How worthy He is of our adoration, trust, and submission! 11

Rev. Chris Mourik is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta.

We also know that Christ could not have been mistaken when He said, “It is finished.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

02

MEDITATION:
Jesus Triumphs on Golgotha

04

EDITORIAL:
Remember Jesus Christ
Risen From the Dead (2)

06

BOOK REVIEW:
You Must Read
Life-Shaping Books!

08

DOCTRINE OF SALVATION:
The Order of Salvation (8)

10

CRISIS IN CANADA:
Assisted Suicide

12

DENOMINATIONAL NEWS:
Organic Union of the
FRC and HRC? (1)

18

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY:
Listening to What is Not Said (1)

16

REFORMED DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS:
Agreed Upon by the Synodical
External Relations Committee

18

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY:
Listening to What is Not Said (2)

22

FRC MISSION UPDATE:
An Open Door for Bible Education:
Mukhanyo's Present Opportunity

REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD (2)

In this short series of editorials, we are seeking to reorient ourselves by focusing on some important things God's Word tells us to remember. We saw the need to remember the days of the right hand of the Lord (see Ps. 77:10-11). Now we turn to the mighty acts of the Lord, and specifically the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8).

Psalm 105:5 instructs us: "Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth." Our nature is prone to forget what God has done, even the wonderful miracles His hand has worked. This should humble us because all the works of God are great and worthy to be remembered. When we forget them, we are clearly preoccupied with things other and lesser than the Lord and His glory.

Particularly serious is the fault of failing to remember the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ instituted the Lord's Supper "in remembrance" of Him (Luke 22:19). His church may never lose sight of His bitter suffering and accursed death in the place of His people, as well as the new and living way He opened up in His death for sinners.

But neither may we forget the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. After laying down His life, the Lord took it up again (see John 10:17). The Father raised Him as a public sign of His righteousness and the acceptance of His work on the cross. He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Paul explicitly calls Timothy to remember that Jesus Christ was raised and links it with the gospel. In other words, there is no gospel without it. It is at the center of the gospel and worthy to be constantly remembered. The verb form in the Greek for the word "remember" means that this is to be done in an ongoing, continual way.

With our emphasis on the vicarious death of Christ to atone for the guilt of sinners, we are in danger of pushing the truth of the resurrection toward the margin of the gospel, but this is not right. Both acts are essential. What is His death without the resurrection? What is His resurrection without His death? When He predicted His death, He also announced His resurrection (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). When the angel declared the resurrection to the women, he said: "I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said" (Matt. 28:5-6).

A view of Christ as crucified and risen (as well as ascended, seated on the throne, and returning one day) gives clear solidity, focus, and comfort to believers. Indeed, “remember his marvellous works that he hath done” (Ps. 105:5).

Remember that He Overcame Death

When we remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, we remember that death could not hold Him. Indeed, He had truly died. He did so, not for His own sin, but as a public person, as Surety of His people. He died in “their room and stead.” Paul says that He was “delivered up for our offences” (Rom. 4:25). Death is the wages of sin, and we must pay that either by ourselves or by another. Were it not that Christ died as the seed of David, in our nature, as the Substitute for sinners, there would be no hope for us. We would have to satisfy the justice of God ourselves in eternal death. That Christ came to suffer and die, the just for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18), is out-of-this-world news. However, how do we know that this death has been truly accepted? How do we know that Satan did not prevail, since he is after one thing: preventing the redemption of man? Is he not the one who “had the power of death” (Heb. 2:14)?

Our Catechism helps us remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead when it says: “By His resurrection He has overcome death” (Lord’s Day 17; A. 45). Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, death is not only the last enemy, but a conquered enemy. When Satan rages against the church; when calamities strike us and strike the world around us; when fears rise up within us and make us forget that Jesus Christ of the seed of David is raised from the dead, the gospel says, “Don’t let anything cover up, spread a fog over, or make you forget that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.” Job was greatly beleaguered, both by the suffering that came upon him, and the provoking speeches of his supposed friends. Yet, one of the times His faith pierced through the clouds over his soul was when he remembered that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead: “I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25). “Now is Christ risen from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). This is the gospel. This is good news.

Remember that He Alone is the Sinner’s Righteousness

Christ’s resurrection is more than an historical event effecting His triumph over death. It gave Him the right and the ground, as the Catechism says, to “make us partakers of that righteousness which He had purchased for us by His death” (LD 17; A 45). If we wish to stand before God, we need righteousness (Ps. 143:1-2), and since our own righteousness is as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6), we need someone else’s righteousness. The only righteousness that will avail for sinners is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is righteousness for sinners through His blood (Rom. 3:21-26). By His death, He purchased an “everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24).

If He had remained dead, He could never apply what He had obtained. But now because of the resurrection, He makes sinners partakers of this righteousness. By the Holy Spirit, He reproves the world of righteousness (John 16:8) and makes us need the righteousness of Christ (Phil. 3:9) and submit to the righteousness of God in Christ (Rom. 10:3).

In this way, and by the power of the new life He has, He can be said to be “raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). In fact, Paul says that this righteousness shall be imputed to us, “if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:24). In all our need to know God as a reconciled God, we cannot do without remembering that “Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead.”

Remember that He Raises Up to a New Life

The salvation Christ has obtained is not simply a salvation that remains outside of us and is ours only by imputation. As glorious and fundamental as that is, the blessings of the resurrection of Christ extend further. The Catechism says that believers “are also by His power raised up to a new life” (LD. 17; A. 45). Without power, we remain dead in sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1,4). We are not just under the power of the devil, but tyrannized, manipulated, and held captive by all sorts of wicked forces, outside and inside us. They want nothing less than to drag us and others down to hell. Even after having received grace, believers fight the fight of their lives against their three-headed

EDITOR: Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes
2692 Bridge Place NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
USA · T: 616.977.0599 ext.121
E: jerry.bilkes@prts.edu

ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Rev. David H. Kranendonk
T: 616.290.4125 · E: kranendonk@frcna.org
The Editors report to the Synodical Publications Committee.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
· Mr. David Tamminga
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Janey Slingerland
(Publications Administrator)
18 Chapala Cres. S.E.
Calgary, AB T2X 3M4 CANADA
T: 403.254.6591 · E: bookorders@frcna.org

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Mrs. Rhonda Kroesbergen
(Messenger Administrator)
E: messenger@frcna.org

OPEN WINDOWS
This bi-monthly publication for children is under the direction of the Free Reformed Publications Committee:
Rev. Jerrold Lewis, General Editor
160 West Parkway, Pompton Plains, NJ 07444
E: jlewis@frcna.org

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MISSIONS AND OUTREACH CAUSES SHOULD BE DIRECTED AS FOLLOWS:

FOREIGN MISSIONS
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Shedden, ON N0L 2E0
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E: john.wilbrink@gmail.com

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mortal enemy, who does not cease to assault them.


Nothing less than the power that raised Christ from the dead will do. Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” If someone says this refers to glorification, then we answer that sanctification is the glorification begun here that will ripen and be fully present at last with the return of Christ. Believers are raised with Christ unto a new life, a life of new obedience. By the power of this life, they will mortify the deeds of the body that they may live. Out of the power of this life of Christ, they will “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). In this way, they will prove the truth: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

What a life believers may live! This life is not their own life, but “Christ in [them], the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Christ has said: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). So often we are focused on the struggle, and sometimes simply on the world and the flesh. We live as if little or nothing has changed or is changing. That is because we have forgotten that “Christ Jesus of the seed of David is raised from the dead.” How we need what the early disciples needed when they had forgotten the words of the Lord Jesus who said that He would rise from the dead. They were disconsolate, doubting, and even despairing. What a difference there came when “he was risen from the dead” and the disciples “remembered that he had said this unto them, and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:22; see Luke 24:8). One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to “bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever [Christ] has said unto [them]” (John 14:26). No wonder the Spirit is called the Comforter, for in the multitudes of our thoughts, His comforts will delight our soul (Ps. 94:19), as we heed His call to remember the risen Savior.

Remember that He Will Raise Us Up Again at the Last

When Paul wrote this to Timothy, he stared death in the face. The Roman emperor was on the throne, but by faith Paul saw that Jesus Christ was higher. Paul knew that God had raised Him up and highly exalted Him, giving Him a name above the name of Caesar and any name in heaven or earth (Phil. 2:9). He knew that God had raised him and all the church together with Christ and “made us sit together in heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6).

Yet, he was still in bonds (2 Tim. 2:9). He suffered trouble and “[endured] all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). He knew that, even if he died, he would live again because of Christ’s life, which was his by grace. He writes: “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Tim. 2:11). Christ was “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). His resurrection “is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection” (LD. 17; A 45). How important it is to remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead.

The story is told of William Carey, the missionary to India, saying to Alexander Duff, who met the aged Carey when he was dying: “When I am gone, do not speak of Dr. Carey, but speak of Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus Christ.” This captures some of what the aged Paul was saying to Timothy as well. Remember most of all that “Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.” 

YOU MUST READ LIFE-SHAPING BOOKS!

YOU MUST READ: Books that have Shaped our Lives with contributions by Joel R. Beeke, Alistair Begg, Jerry Bridges, Mark Dever, J. Ligon Duncan, R. Albert Mohler, Jr, John MacArthur, Stuart Olyott, R.C. Sproul, Derek W. H. Thomas, Geoffrey Thomas, and many others. Published by The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015, Softcover, 289 pages.

This book has a strange title. “YOU MUST READ” can be used as an imperative that you must read, or it can be used as an exclamation because you like the book you are reading so much.

The over-arching theme of this book is that books change lives. When you read how this is confirmed by thirty or more well-known Reformed and Calvinistic preachers and leaders, you will understand the importance of reading this book. This book is “dedicated to Iain and Jean Murray, whose vision, dedication, ministry and encouragement has undergirded publication of every volume (without exception) selected in *You Must Read*. Humanly speaking, without their joint service to our Lord, it is unlikely that many of these books would have been published in our lifetime, and also improbable that other publishers would have caught their vision and published similar books” (Introduction, p. xiii). This dedicatory tribute is undersigned by six Trustees of the Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, dated March 2015.

If you think this is an over-statement, start reading. The first chapter is by the well-known Southern Baptist theologian and seminary president, R. Albert Mohler, Jr. He writes that the interest in the publication of Iain Murray’s *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, by Banner of Truth Trust, led the way in a resurgence of interest in the theology and preaching of Spurgeon, the kind of preaching that had almost been forgotten. Spurgeon’s stand in opposing a downgrade in doctrinal preaching inspired Mohler as a young man to accept the invitation to lead a movement in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to take a similar stand against the onslaughts of Arminianism. “Spurgeon saw Arminianism to be a departure from the purity of New Testament evangelism and [asserted] religious superficiality to be one of its attendant consequences” (p. 4). Mohler states: “I simply cannot calculate the importance to me of the example of Charles Spurgeon as I undertook the task of bringing reformation and theological correction in a great and historic theological institution” (p.7). He writes: “In the great battle on the campus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and on the other side of the battle until this very day, [this] is the Spurgeon that has been my constant companion, counsellor, and friend throughout the last twenty years and more I have served in this office. This is the Spurgeon for which I owe so much to Iain Murray and his most important book [*The Forgotten Spurgeon*]” (p. 8)

There are similar testimonies regarding the reprinting of Reformed classics and other books published by the Banner of Truth. For instance, the well-known John MacArthur writes: “Through Iain Murray’s record of his life, Martyn Lloyd-Jones continues even now to teach me, encourage me, challenge my thinking, and provide a model of the kind of courage, conviction and faithful-

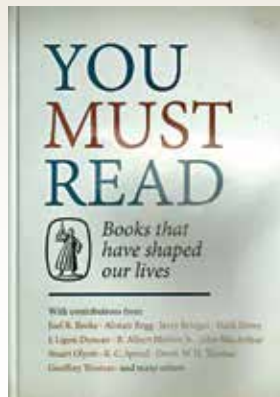
ness I aspire to" (p. 221). He is referring to the legacy of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, particularly in the late 1970s when he read through *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, published by Banner of Truth, which helped him preach from Matthew 5-7. MacArthur mentions that though he had never heard "the Doctor" speak, he became influential in his mature years of ministry at Grace Community Church by way of Murray's biography, "with its careful analysis of doctrinal ecclesiological, and practical ministry issues" (p. 222).

The other testimonies in this book, which are in chapters about four or five pages in length, may not be as far-reaching, but have no less dramatic and life-changing effects. Derek Thomas, long-time senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina, visiting professor of systematic and historical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, and associated with Ligonier Ministries, writes about the influence the reprinted works of J. C. Ryle have on his ministry. Ever since he encountered Ryle in 1974, he has profited from these publications. "I doubt... that I have ever preached on a Gospel passage without consulting what Ryle had to say about it" (p. 63). He is referring to Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, reprinted in paperback by Banner of Truth in 1986, with a new edition in 2012, and an ebook version in 2015. Thomas continues his praise of Ryle with short and meaningful quotations taken from each of the volumes. He includes a brief biography of Ryle's life and mentions other books by bishop Ryle: *Knots Untied*, *Practical Religion* and *Holiness*.

There are many interesting stories and anecdotes to be found in this book. It is not surprising to find that R.C. Sproul has high praise for Jonathan Edwards' writings, especially his treatise, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended: Evidence of Its Truth Produced, and Arguments to the Contrary Answered*, found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M.*, a Banner of Truth publication. Sproul is fascinated by Edwards' defense that "even if the Bible were silent on the matter [original sin], this doctrine would still be evident to natural reason" (p. 91).

Jerry Bridges writes that, after the Holy Spirit opened his eyes for the doctrine of election, he discovered Banner of Truth books in a Christian bookshop which carried all their books. He soon, in 1961, filled his small bookshelf with books such as Robert Haldane's *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, which committed him to Reformed theology. After that, he was especially influenced by George Smeaton's *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*.

Joel Beeke has kept a copy of Rutherford's *Letters* by Banner on his nightstand for twenty years. Al Martin mentions the 1961 Banner publication, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, by Professor John Murray as a "standout" among the books for personal edification and for reference. Sinclair Ferguson cites John Owen, who he states is "By any measure... the greatest Puritan theologian in the esteem of some, probably the greatest English theologian since the Reformation" (p. 248). Although Owen was at one time a confidante



of Oliver Cromwell, fell out of favor, and so was forced out of the Church of England in 1662, Ferguson finds it remarkable that he is found among the many authors or preachers today "who are serious 'thought-leaders' of a younger generation of ministers." Speaking "only for myself," Ferguson declares, "Owen goes down deeper, stays down longer, and comes up with greater spiritual riches than can be found in the vast bulk of contemporary Christian literature. Speaking only for myself, whenever I return to something written by Owen I wonder if I am wasting my time reading lesser works" (p. 248).

Some younger men who appreciate the influence of Banner books are Mark Dever, who treasures *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, and especially his treatise, *A Bruised Reed*, printed in a paperback series, which he makes required reading for his church's internship program (p. 156). Ligon Duncan writes that

he has been helped by *The Works of Thomas Brooks* and that his *Precious Remedies* is one of his favourites.

The book includes chapters by two Dutch theologians. Peter De Vries writes that his father, a reader, preferred the English and Scottish Puritans to the Dutch writers. As a young man, he read the *Select Sermons of George Whitefield*, and others, while on summer vacation in 1974 in Scotland. His favourite is Archibald Alexander's *Thoughts on Religious Experience*.

It is fascinating to read the testimonials of the other authors. It is also noteworthy that two women authors are included who were greatly blessed by Banner of Truth books. They are Faith Cook (*The Works of John Bunyan*) and Sharon James (*Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* by Iain H. Murray). We do not doubt that many stories of blessings through Banner of Truth books could be added, including one by the reviewer of this book.

The book ends with an *Epilogue*, which includes "A View from Latin America" (p. 265). Banner of Truth books have gone to many other countries. There are many translations into Spanish and lately into Chinese and many into Portuguese. When my husband spoke at a Puritan conference in Brazil some years ago, we were taken to a bookshop where we saw many of these books. The *Epilogue* also has a tribute from the Philippines. The last page has a picture of dear and faithful Iain and Jean Murray, now in their nineties, who continue to stand in the background as they see the unfolding of God's work.

One of the early associates of Banner of Truth sums up the success of the book ministry this way: "Banner of Truth books have been a blessing to the world. The trust's careful selection of the great authors and stalwarts of the reformed faith, the solid doctrinal content and the quality production of Banner books, have been like seeds that have blossomed in the life of countless young men and budding theologians, which has no doubt greatly contributed to the revival of Reformed theology that has taken place since the 1950s" (p. 269-70).

The distribution of Banner of Truth books and others like them continues. You must read! To God be the glory – great things He has done – and is still doing.

Mrs. Frederika (Ricky) Pronk is a member of the Free Reformed Church of Brantford and involved in Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario.

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THE ORDER OF SALVATION (8)

So far, we have covered the first two steps or elements of the order of salvation, namely, calling (external and internal) and regeneration. We will now turn to the third element in the process of salvation, namely conversion, which includes both repentance and faith. Conversion is the manifestation of the spiritual life which God the Holy Spirit works in dead sinners by his regenerating grace.

Conversion Defined

Conversion may be defined as the activity of the born-again individual consisting of a radical change of desire and direction. The miraculous birth from above (John 3:3,7) marks the beginning of a twofold process whereby the sinner turns *away* from serving sin and turns *towards* serving God. According to Herman Bavinck, conversion consists in “the activity of the regenerate person alongside of and in connection with faith by which he learns to know, hate, and flee sin in its true nature, returns with a humble confession of sin to God as his Father in Christ and proceeds with a joyful heart to walk in his ways.” While regeneration or the new birth, like our natural birth, is solely the work of God without any participation of man, its fruit, conversion, consists of repentance and faith and calls for the active involvement of new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

The history of Christian doctrine, however, shows that there are contrasting opinions regarding human involvement in God’s saving activity. Some theologians so stress divine sovereignty over every aspect of salvation that they become passivists, if not fatalists. “God must do it and all we can do is wait for Him to act” is their basic principle. Others go to the other extreme and emphasize the role they must play in salvation. They do agree that God’s part in man’s salvation is significant, even crucial, but they also must take part in the decision-making process. The latter view is held by Arminians, who admit that, through the Fall, man lost the image of God in which he was created, but not all of it. He retained the freedom of his will, at least in part. Reformed Christians strongly disagree with them. They believe that when man fell, he lost the full image of God, including the freedom of the will. But what exactly does this mean? How should this loss of freedom be interpreted?

The Interpretation of the Canons of Dort

At the Synod of Dort (1618/19), the Reformed Church challenged the Arminian faction within the Church and condemned its erroneous views on the post-fall nature of the human will. In Article 16 of the Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, our Reformed fathers wrote under the caption *Of the Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof*:

As man by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin which pervaded the whole race of mankind deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death; so also this grace of re-

generation does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign, in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. Wherefore unless the admirable Author of every good work wrought in us, man could have no hope of recovering from his fall by his own free will, by the abuse of which, in a state of innocence, he plunged himself into ruin.

Here as Reformed churches we confess that salvation is the work of God alone. God works irresistibly, removing all the obstacles which stand in the way of salvation. He does this sovereignly, powerfully, and invincibly. The question of the Arminians was, how exactly does God do this?

Salvation by Force or Persuasion?

The Arminians accused the Reformed of teaching that God forces the sinner to be saved against his will, whereas the Arminians believed that the grace of God whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising which is most in harmony with man's nature and the noblest manner of working in the conversion of man (Rejection of Errors, Article 7).

How did our Reformed fathers respond to this? They denied the charge that sovereign grace involves the use of violent force. But they also denied that God merely advises, suggests, or persuades man to conversion. He does not compel the sinner against his will but *makes* the sinner willing. God finds the sinner dead in trespasses and sins, unable and unwilling to repent and believe. But He performs a secret work in his heart whereby that will is changed.

The Issue at Stake

The issue at stake between the Arminians and the Reformed concerns human nature as it has become by the fall. According to Article 4 of chapter III and IV, man lost the image of God, which essentially consisted of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. But he retained the image in its wider sense, meaning fallen man remained a rational, moral creature. He did not become an animal, even though Asaph says in Psalm 73:22, "I was as a beast before thee." Although God's people will sometimes humble themselves to that low level, man never can and never will become an animal. He will always, even in hell, remain a human being. Man did not lose the essence of his human nature. Sin corrupted that nature and made it spiritually dead. But man still possesses a soul and a body, a mind and a will.

What then has changed? For one thing, the entire direction of man's nature. The same mind that once thought God-glorifying and God-honouring thoughts now thinks wicked and immoral thoughts. The same will whereby man once served the Lord he now uses to serve himself, the world, and the devil. It is the same man, but he is now running away from God towards his own destruction. After the

fall, man became spiritually dead in sins, as Ephesians 2 tells us. As such, he is unable to do any good. In this sense, man is passive. He cannot contribute anything towards his salvation, contrary to what the Arminians teach.

As we saw on the other hand, some place a wrong emphasis on man's spiritual deadness. They only stress the fact that man is dead in a passive sense. He can't do anything. But that is not the Bible's complete picture of the natural man. The Bible does not only say that we are dead in a passive sense so that we cannot do anything, but also speaks of man being an enemy of God. As such, man is very much alive with resentment against God. Therefore, we should be careful that we do not just think of man in his natural state as a corpse. The truth about man is even worse. He is an enemy, an active opponent of God. He never stops trying to come up with more acts of disobedience to God and His overtures of grace.

Our fathers describe this truth when they say that the "grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties." God does not deal with sinners as if they were merely passively dead. If he were merely a senseless stock and block, he could not be held accountable. A log that lies in the forest rotting away is indeed dead and passive, but it cannot be blamed for being hostile.

Man is and always will remain a moral, rational creature who can be, and therefore will be, held responsible for what he is and does. Therefore, our spiritual death is not our misfortune, but it is our crime for which we are fully responsible.

If man were a senseless stock and block, he would have to be created anew in order to be saved. But salvation is not a new creation; it is a re-creation. In regeneration, man remains essentially the same person, same self, and same personality.

How wrong the Arminians are in accusing the Reformed of saying that God uses mechanical force! The *Canons*, refuting this lie, state that God "spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends the will." The force God uses is His creative energy at work inside the heart. When sinners are saved, God exercises tremendous power; yet believers experience it as a sweet bending of the will. The love of God breaks the heart and makes us willing to do what we formerly refused to do.

God makes His people willing in the day of His power. He enables them to voluntarily go in His ways. He causes them to sorrow for sin and weep because of their guilt. He melts their hearts under a sense of His love.

God has a willing people who have experienced the work of the Holy Spirit. They are the real "free willers," the only ones who really have a free will, because they love to do the will of the Lord. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps. 110:3). In the day of Christ's power, His Spirit puts forth His mighty hand and blesses the preaching of His servants. Only when the Holy Spirit applies that preached Word will you see conversions and sinners saved.

Next time, D. V., we will take a look at various types of conversion that can occur in sinners' lives. ●

CRISIS IN CANADA: ASSISTED SUICIDE

It was a privilege to be visited last summer by a friend from overseas. Sadly, his country was in the midst of a crisis. He spoke about the effects of civil war, an unstable government, and food scarcity. Amid such trials, he also spoke of growing churches and gospel faithfulness. The suffering that this brother had endured seemed unimaginable. We talked about how Canada has been incomparably stable, peaceful, and prosperous. Many Canadian Christians, however, are noticing that we are entering a different kind of crisis. Though our nation's violence may primarily be carried out in the sterile rooms of hospitals, it is a grim reality. Behind closed doors, Canada is becoming a nation of state-sanctioned lawlessness and violence.

Canada has changed considerably since the 1960s. A pluralistic national identity has emerged, which has demanded the acceptance of various worldviews. Laws were altered to allow no-fault divorce, unlimited abortion, and the redefinition of marriage. Progressive conversion therapy, hate speech, and censorship bills have recently been passed. Perhaps most startling has been the speed with which our nation has changed its approach to assisted suicide.

Ten years ago, this practice was illegal. In February 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Canadian Parliament had to amend criminal code prohibitions to address the rights of individuals who wanted access to assisted suicide. At that time, Canada was governed by a Conservative Party majority that failed to introduce legislation. The responsibility to address the court ruling fell to the progressive Liberal Party government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who was elected in October 2015.

In 2016, this Liberal government introduced legislation that allowed terminally ill adults to access "medical assistance in dying" (MAID). Assisted suicide is now largely known in Canada by this acronym. Words such as *euthanasia*, *assisted suicide*, or *mercy killing* have faded from official use. In this legislation, death had to be "reasonably foreseeable" for a patient to qualify, and several regulatory boxes had to be checked. Though the language surrounding these changes appeared to be compassionate to many people, the reality was that God's prerogative to choose the moment of death was being challenged (Ex. 20:13; Ps. 48:14).

Since the initial change, the issue has snowballed. In 2020, the government introduced new legislation to permit assisted suicide for individuals whose death was *not* reasonably foreseeable. Since then, it has become clear that a significant proportion of the population and media voices favour few limits on the practice. Perhaps most troubling is the latest development. As of March 17, 2023, assisted suicide will be allowed for persons whose sole medical

condition is mental illness. A person who is severely depressed or delusional will be able to demand assisted suicide.

A special committee is also discussing extending MAID to children, which several leading pediatricians have recommended. It seems that assisted suicide in Canada may soon join the unlimited status that abortion has been given: it will be offered at any time to anyone, as long as a victim gives consent, and a medical professional is willing to administer the poison. Suicide is being streamlined and mainstreamed. Assisted suicide is also now being lauded as a solution to the lack of donor organs for transplants.

This issue in Canada also comes in the context of socialized healthcare. There are few alternatives to the public healthcare system, which is strained. In the region where I live, it is not uncommon to wait many hours, sometimes overnight, for treatment in an emergency room. It can take months to see a specialist and even more time for a scan or test. Mental health supports are also difficult for many to access. Canadians have heard of an increasing number of anecdotal accounts of this final solution being persuasively proposed to those who still wanted to live. This has included the elderly who are seeking treatments and veterans with post-traumatic stress

disorder. News articles recount the horrific experiences of families who were completely surprised to find out that relatively healthy family members had died.

Compounding the confusion is the reality that MAID has become an umbrella term for various end-of-life treatments. A reasonable dose of painkillers, which may allow a person in palliative care to have a good night's sleep, could be included under the phrase "medical assistance in dying." But how much is too much? At what point have we reached out for a false saviour and denied God's sovereignty over our death? Did we go too far in artificially attempting to extend lives? How do we read God's providences regarding life and death? Difficult questions abound. Many pastors are already relating an increasing number of stories where church members have been coerced or convinced to accept treatments that seemed to end their lives. Some Christians are confused. The most radical option is often presented in the guise of compassion and concern for a strained healthcare system.

Why has a nation that trumpeted suicide hotlines and went to great lengths to avoid death by COVID so quickly embraced assisted suicide with few limits? It seems like a baffling question. Somewhere at the roots may be the reality that Canadians demand a right to avoid all suffering. Their humanism demands sovereignty over life, sickness, and death.

Christians must remember that the goal of our lives is not primarily to escape suffering. In fact, we ought to see that our sovereign

This challenge also brings opportunities for prayer. In God's sovereign providence, times of prayer have been at the root of great deliverances.

God has a good purpose for suffering. I Peter 4:12–19 teaches Christians that we ought not to be surprised when we face challenges:


Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

These are becoming difficult times for Canadian Christians. Knowing God's holiness, we wrestle with moral issues on a level that many in our culture cannot understand. When we cling to biblical definitions and gospel truths, we may find ourselves insulted for the name of Christ. These trends are proof of the truth of God's Word: He warned us through Peter that judgment begins at the house of God. We are being tested, and our calling is to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. It is precisely these types of trials that conform us to the image of Christ and lead to the glory of God.

The good news in a time like this is that it also increases opportunities for Christians to do good. We can champion the cause of palliative care and provide it ourselves if necessary. Christians can build nursing homes or hospitals. Families or friends may have the opportunity to accommodate dying loved ones. Though this may be challenging, it may also bring many opportunities for us to exercise hospitality and visit the sick (James 1:27; 5:14). It will also become a testimony of the goodness of our Savior, in whom we die with the utmost dignity.

This challenge also brings opportunities for prayer. In God's sovereign providence, times of prayer have been at the root of great deliverances (Dan. 2:18; Acts 1:14). We can especially pray for the godly doctors and nurses who increasingly find themselves out of step with these policies. Many have mourned as they have seen their hospitals becoming the opposite of what they once were. Pray that their faithful testimony will shine brightly in the darkness. The Lord delights to use challenging times to gather us nearer to Himself and to answer our prayers for deliverance, so let us be faithful to draw near to Him (Ps. 50:15).

Rev. Robert VanDoodewaard is pastor of Hope (Free) Reformed Church in Powassan, Ontario. This article is republished with permission from Tabletalk of March 15, 2023 (<https://tabletalk-magazine.com/>)



54th ANNUAL Ladies' CONFERENCE
of the Free Reformed Churches

Being Heavenly Minded in a Broken World

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10:00 AM
Speaker: Pastor Mark Wagenaar

Afternoon Session
1:30 PM
ARPA Presentation

Tuesday
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Chatham Free Reformed Church
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Speaker
Pastor Pieter VanderMeyden

When
Tuesday
May 2, 2023

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253 Weir's Lane,
Dundas, ON L9H 5E1

Coffee
9:45 AM,

Morning Session
10:30 AM
Speech in English

Afternoon Session:
1:30 PM
Q&A followed by a Dutch hymn-sing.

ORGANIC UNION OF THE FRC AND HRC? (1)

REV. J. SCHOEMAN



During the last number of years, the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) and the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC) have been discussing the subject of organic union. Organic union is the merging of two federations (in this case the FRC and the HRC) into one new denomination.

The merging together of two or more churches to form a new denomination is not new. In the Netherlands, two streams of Dutch Secession churches merged in 1869. Then in 1892, the churches of the Secession and the churches of the Doleantie merged to form the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. Sometime later, in 1907, Rev. G.H. Kersten was instrumental in the union of various independent Reformed churches to form the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (from which the HRC draws its roots). Around the same time, in 1900, the vast majority of the Free Church of Scotland joined with the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland to form the United Free Church of Scotland, which in turn mostly re-joined with the Church of Scotland in 1929. In 1925, in Canada, two thirds of the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and the Congregationalist churches merged to form the United Church of Canada. There have been many such mergers in various countries. Most of them have endured to the present day, though they have not all remained orthodox.

Should the FRC and HRC ever achieve such a merger, what would this look like practically? At the local level, nothing would change. We would continue to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity. We would continue to worship in the same way. We would continue to use the same liturgical forms and the same Psalter. The only major difference is that our synod and combined consistories would become larger due to the fact that there would be a greater number of churches represented (32 in total – 10 HRC and 22 FRC). Also, the denomination might have a new name and would function according to a new church order, which we trust would not be much different than our current church order. Other than that, we would continue to function as we always have.

In pursuit of this goal of union, in 2016, the synods of both the FRC and HRC agreed to form an ad hoc committee known as the “FRC/HRC Unity Committee” or simply the “Unity Committee” made up of four members from each denomination. As a “joint” committee, this committee is answerable to the synods of both denominations.

The mandate of this committee is:

1. To help our respective federations understand the scriptural and confessional grounds for church union.
2. To assess the desirability and feasibility of an eventual union between the FRC and HRC, taking into consideration both our similarities and differences and the obstacles that stand in the way of such union.
3. To propose ways in which these obstacles can be overcome.

The FRC members of this committee include myself (Rev. Jack Schoeman, Abbotsford, BC), Connor Keuning (Hamilton, ON), Rev. Eric Moerdyk (St. Thomas, ON) and Ed Laman (Brantford, ON). The HRC members of this committee include Jim Beeke (Chilliwack, BC), Dr. Mark Kelderman (Grand Rapids, MI), Kevin Ash (Grand Rapids, MI) and Rev. Don Overbeek (Bradford, ON). Jim Beeke and I serve as alternating chairmen of this committee.

Why Organic Union?

The question may be asked: Why are our federations talking about this? Why don't we just live side by side in peace? Are there not more important priorities for the church like reaching the lost for Christ? What are the reasons for discussing an organic union of our two federations?

We can categorize these reasons under the following headings: Biblical, Confessional, Practical and Other. Not everyone may agree with these reasons, but these are the reasons that the Unity Committee submitted to our respective synods several years ago as to why we should unite.

BIBLICAL REASONS

1. Unity is the Desire of Christ

In His high priestly prayer (John 17), our Lord prayed for the unity of His church: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17: 21). Organic union is the desire of our Lord Himself. He prays that the unity of the church might reflect the unity between the Father and the Son.

Some have argued that our Lord here is merely praying for spiritual unity.

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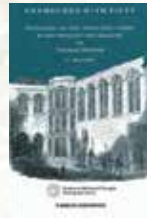
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Enamoured with Piety: Godliness as the Pervading Theme in the Thought and Ministry of Thomas Watson

By Yarran Johnston

Being released in the 400th anniversary of his birth, *Enamoured with Piety* by Dr. Yarran Johnston, offers an insight into the life and ministry of the Puritan, Thomas Watson. Johnston traces the pervading theme of godliness in Watson's thoughts and writings, making the case that Watson represents English Puritanism in its mature phase, specifically in its understanding of godliness as a proper regard for God. Softcover, 322 pages, Tulip Publishing **RBS Price \$30.00**



The Mischief of Sin **By Thomas Watson**

This treatise by the renowned Puritan Thomas Watson was originally published in 1671 and never again until this edition. It was one of his rarest works for over three centuries. Watson's perceptive discussion on the devastating effects of sin includes four parts: 1 of Sin; 2. The Desperateness of Sinners; 3. An Alarm to Sinners; 4 Hell's Furnace Heated Hotter. Appended is a scarce treatment by Watson, “The Mystery of the Lord's Supper.” Softcover, 162 pages, Soli Deo Gloria Publications **RBS Price \$11.00**



RECENT BOOKS

Black & Reformed: Seeing God's Sovereignty in the African-American Christian Experience

By Anthony J. Carter

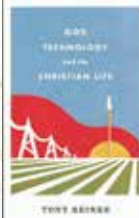
African Americans have a rich and compelling Christian heritage—one that stretches back to foundational figures such as the church fathers Augustine and Tertullian. Yet white Christians often expect their black brothers and sisters to embrace a Eurocentric theology that marginalizes their own experiences and traditions. In this book, Anthony Carter draws both black and Reformed theology together. He shows how Reformed theology's biblical stance addresses African-American experiences such as the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and oppression by so-called Christians. Carter also explores a few of the ways that an explicitly black theology can enhance our understanding of God and his Word, no matter our ethnicity. Anthony Carter (MA, Reformed Theological Seminary) is lead pastor of East Point Church in East Point, Georgia. He is the author of several books, including *Black and Reformed*, and is contributing editor of *Experiencing the Truth and Glory Road*. He is also a frequent conference speaker, guest lecturer, and preacher. He and his wife, Adriane have five children. This second edition includes new material: a foreword by Thabiti Anyabwile, an interview with the author, and discussion questions for each chapter. Softcover, 157 pages, P & R Publishing
RBS Price \$15.00



God, Technology and the Christian Life

By Tony Reinke

What Does God Think about Technology? From smartphones to self-driving cars to space travel, new technologies can inspire us. But the breakneck pace of change can also frighten us. So how do Christians walk by faith through the innovations of Silicon Valley? And how does God relate to our most powerful innovators? To build a biblical theology of technology, journalist and tech optimist Tony Reinke examines nine key texts from Scripture to show how the world's discoveries are divinely orchestrated. Ultimately, what we believe about God determines how we respond to human invention. With the help of several theologians and inventors throughout history, Reinke dispels twelve common myths in the church and offers fourteen ethical convictions to help Christians live by faith in the age of big tech. Softcover, 316 pages, Crossway
RBS Price \$19.00



Seasons of Sorrow: The Pain of Loss and the Comfort of God

By Tim Challies

An honest look at grief and fears, faith and hope. Combining personal narrative, sound theology, and beautiful writing, this is a book for anyone who has loved and lost. On November 3, 2020, Tim and Aileen Challies received the shocking news that their son Nick had died. A twenty-year-old student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, he had been participating in a school activity with his fiancée, sister, and friends, when he fell unconscious and collapsed to the ground. Neither students nor a passing doctor nor paramedics were able to revive him. His parents received the news at their home in Toronto and immediately departed for Louisville to be together as a family. While on the plane, Tim, an author and blogger, began to process his loss through writing. In *Seasons of Sorrow*, Tim shares real-time reflections from the first year of grief—through the seasons from fall to summer—introducing readers to what he describes as the “ministry of sorrow.” *Seasons of Sorrow* will benefit both those that are working through sorrow or those comforting others: The author, a pastor, noted speaker, and author of numerous articles is a pioneer in the Christian blogosphere. Tim and his family reside near Toronto, Ontario. Hardcover, 208 pages, Zondervan
RBS Price \$ 25.00



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While this unity is spiritual, it is also visible. The reason why our Lord prays for the unity of His church is “so that the world may believe that thou [the Father] hath sent me.” The world is incapable of observing spiritual unity. It can only observe what it sees. Therefore, the unity of which our Lord speaks must include a visible unity. In fact, as our Lord says, this unity has an evangelistic purpose. It will serve as a witness to the world that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the One whom the Father has sent to make atonement for sin.

In light of this, the Lord must be deeply grieved when He sees how fragmented His church has become – especially over the past two centuries. Therefore, we are duty bound to seek to unite with those of like precious faith.

2. Unity is pleasing to God’s people (and ultimately to God Himself)

In Psalm 133, David declares “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” He then goes on to compare this unity to “the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments” and to “the dew of Hermon, *and as the dew* that descended upon the mountains of Zion.” The point here is clear: unity is pleasing to the saints of God and ultimately to God Himself.

To be sure, this pertains especially to unity within the same congregation; such unity is indeed precious and delightful. But what is true at a local level should also be true at a federative level and even between federations. God delights to see His people dwell together in unity. In fact, as David goes on to say in verse 3, where there is unity, “the LORD commanded the blessing, *even* life for evermore.” Organic unity is not only pleasing to the Lord, but also serves the church’s wellbeing.

3. Unity is the ultimate expression of what the church is as the only body of Christ

In Ephesians 4:4-6, the apostle Paul writes, “*There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Paul here states that the church is one. She is one body, is animated by one Spirit, has one hope, is united to the same Lord, through the same faith, by the same baptism, having the same Father. A clear expression of this oneness is organic unity.

CONFESSIONAL REASONS

1. The Apostle’s Creed

In the Apostle’s Creed, we confess that we believe “an holy, catholic church, the communion of saints.” Notice the word “an.” We do not believe “in” the holy, catholic church. The church is not the object of our faith and trust. The church cannot save us. Only Christ can do that. Rather we confess “an” holy, catholic church.

The word “an” means “one”. We confess that the church is one. Sadly, organizationally, the church is not one, but divided into many denominations. Yet, she is one spiritually. If that is the case, then she must also become one visibly. We are called to pursue the ideal which we confess.

2. The Heidelberg Catechism

Commenting on this same article in the Apostle’s Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. & A. 54) says that when we confess “an holy Catholic church” we confess “that the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a Church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.” If we confess the church is one, we must strive for visible unity.

3. The Belgic Confession

Similarly, in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession we confess that “since [the church] is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salva-

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“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord” Revelation 11:15

tion, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; *maintaining the unity of the Church*; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the *same* body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them" (italics mine).

Maintaining the unity of the church is a confessional matter, meaning we have bound ourselves to practice it as confessing members of the church.

PRACTICAL REASONS

Several practical benefits to union between the FRC and HRC can be given:

1. It would eliminate the enormous amount of duplication in committee work, meetings, and publications.
2. It would eliminate the current structure of governance of PRTS with two overseeing denominations – one "major" and the other "minor" – making oversight of the seminary less cumbersome.
3. Given its larger size, it would allow for the introduction of a full classis system, replacing the combined consistory meetings which do not fully function as a classis.
4. It would enable us to pool financial and human resources for the work of Christ's kingdom (seminary, missions, outreach work, etc.).
5. It would broaden our reach in terms of missions and evangelism.
6. It would help the strengths of each denomination be of service to the other.

OTHER REASONS

There are several other reasons why our two denominations should consider merging:

1. There are many similarities between the FRC and HRC. Concerning convictions and practices, the HRC and FRC might be the two denominations closest together in the Reformed world. Consider the following:
 - a. Both denominations subscribe to the same Confessions (The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort) and Creeds (the Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed and Athanasian Creed).
 - b. In 2006 both synods received/adopted a Statement of Joint Doctrinal Agreement on matters regarding which there are divergent views in the broader Reformed community and which have been a source of division among Reformed churches (see elsewhere in this issue).
 - c. The FRC and HRC worship services are very similar, marked by simplicity, reverence, Psalm singing, and the centrality of preaching. We sing from the same Psalter and use the same liturgical forms.
 - d. The FRC and HRC are one in their conviction that preaching needs to be Biblical, exegetical, doctrinal, confessional, experiential, discriminating, evangelistic, Christ-centered, and covenantal.
2. Unity is the logical culmination of the past twenty years of growing together. Since 2014, the FRC and HRC have enjoyed a relationship of complete correspondence – the highest level of ecclesiastical contact. This allows us to call each other's ministers and receive each other's members at the Lord's Supper among other things. Neither federation has this level of relationship with any other church in North America. Our churches have this relationship only with one other denomination – our sister churches in the Netherlands (the CGK). Organic union seems to be the next logical step.
3. There is a sense of spiritual unity as we meet at office bearers' conferences, minister's retreats, concurrent synods, joint consistory and committee meetings, attend each other's worship services, hear each other's ministers, and work together at Puritan Reformed. Perhaps the clearest expression of this unity is the fact that over the years, several of our ministers received calls to HRC churches. Two of these calls were accepted: Rev. I Macleod now serves the HRC of Tillsonburg, ON and Rev. J. Proce

now serves the HRC congregation of Chilliwack, BC. Conversely, several HRC ministers / candidates received calls to FRC churches. Four of these calls were accepted: Rev. S. Dibbet accepted the call of the congregation of Lacombe (now Blackfalds), AB; Rev. D Van Brugge accepted the call of the congregation of Brantford, ON, Rev. J Neels accepted the call of the congregation of Blackfalds, AB, and Rev. I Epp accepted the call of the congregation of Picture Butte, AB.

4. Churches with whom we maintain some form of ecclesiastical contact support such a union, expect it, and urge us to keep pursuing it. We hear this many times at interdenominational gatherings such as NAPARC.
5. Significantly, FRC delegates to broader ecclesiastical assemblies (combined consistory meetings and synods) are required to stand to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Part of the declaration that is read states "that we desire to receive into our church community any who agree with our confession" and expresses the desire that "those who have received like precious faith with us" might also "reveal the grace shown to them in the seeking of the fellowship of the saints to the glory of Him who prayed that all His own shall be one." What we confess at such gatherings must also be pursued and practiced.

So there are good reasons to pursue organic union. But there are also some significant obstacles. We hope to consider some of these obstacles in our next installment. 🙏

Rev J. Schoeman is the pastor of the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford and has been involved in discussions with the HRC for the past 20 years. He also serves as co-chairman of the FRC/HRC Unity Committee. This article was submitted with the consent of the FRC members of the Unity Committee.

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REFORMED DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

Agreed upon by the Synodical External Relations Committee of the Free Reformed Churches of N.A. and the Classis of the Heritage Reformed Congregations in October 2006

The following are doctrinal statements on which there are divergent views in the Reformed church community. These statements do not have extra creedal status in our churches; they simply are our views on a number of important doctrinal points, to which we agree as denominations. This statement is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive, balanced, or exhaustive summary of our beliefs. Wherever possible, statements are expressed positively.

1. SCRIPTURES

- a. The Autographs of the Bible are infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ex. 34:27; Heb. 1:1; 1 Peter 1:21; 2 Peter 1:21
- b. The Bible is free from error of any sort: scientific and historical as well as moral and theological.
- c. A text in Scripture has only one unified meaning, which inheres in the text or passage. 2 Peter 1:20,21
- d. Scriptures are to be translated into the common language of each nation.

2. CONFESSIONS

- a. The Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession, while subordinate to Scriptures, are reliable, relevant, and valid confessions of our churches.
- b. The Westminster Standards essentially concur with the Three Forms of Unity.

3. CREATION

- a. God created heaven and earth in six 24-hour days. Ex. 20:11
- b. The creation record in the Bible is factual, historical and perspicuous. Gen. 1,2; Rev. 4:11

4. COVENANT OF GRACE

- a. The Covenant of Grace is with believers and their children, Christ being its Mediator. Acts 2:39,3:25; Gal. 4:28; Heb. 12:24
- b. Our children, as members of the Covenant, are subject to its blessings and curses. Gen. 17:7; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 28; Ps. 127:3; Mat. 8:12; Rom. 3:1,2
- c. We do not hold to presumptive regeneration, but expectantly plead for the fulfillment of the Covenant promises, which takes place in the way of regeneration, personal repentance, and faith in Christ, worked by the Holy Spirit.
- d. There are two kinds of Covenant children. All Covenant children possess an external holiness, which becomes internal and soul-saving upon regeneration and conversion. Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 16:20,21; Rom. 9:6,7; 11:18-23; 1 Cor. 7:14 45
- e. It is possible for the Covenant to be broken through disobedience and unbelief. Jer. 31:32; Rom. 10:20,21; Heb. 4:2
- f. The Covenant of Grace is founded on and inseparably connected to the Council of Peace or Covenant of Redemption, which is an agreement among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with regard to the salvation of the elect. Ps. 40, 89
- g. The covenant congregation includes believers, but also those who are hypocrites, presumptuous, self-righteous, careless and indifferent, i.e. all, including children, who have not yet come to faith and repentance. Mat. 7:21-23; 25:1-13; Luke 8:4-15; Acts 8:13; Rom. 16:18; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 2:15-17; 13:5; Gal. 4:11; Eph. 4:21; Rev. 3:1

5. PROFESSION OF FAITH

- a. Profession of faith should be of a true faith. Ex. 20:7; Mat. 10:32; Rom. 10:9,10
- b. Such profession is not a profession of regeneration or assurance. Acts 8:37
- c. Since consistories cannot discern the heart, they admit those who wish to make a public confession of faith on the basis of their Christian profession

and their walk of life. 1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 11:20; Mat. 13:24-30; Acts 8:13

- d. There is a close relationship between profession of faith and the Lord's Supper; not an automatic one. All confessing members are duly called by Christ to examine themselves whether they are in the faith, and so to partake of the Lord's Supper.

6. PREACHING

- a. Faithful preaching must be scriptural, confessional, evangelical, experiential, discriminatory, and covenantal. Ezek. 33:1-10; Mat. 4:17; 5; Luke 24:27; Acts 20:26-27; 1 Cor. 14:8; 2 Cor. 5:20; 13:5; Gal. 4:19; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 2,3
- b. Preaching should set forth salvation in the framework of the Triune God, that is, the decree of salvation, the accomplishment of salvation, and the application of salvation. Preaching must balance the redemptive-historical and experiential elements by distinguishing the relationship between (the person and work of) Christ and the Spirit, whom Christ in His exaltation has shed abroad upon His Church. In light of this, preaching must trace and urge the experiential knowledge of guilt, grace, and gratitude in the lives of God's people, in both its initial and ongoing stages, while guarding against becoming unscripturally methodical.
- c. The promises of the Gospel, which are well meant, are to be offered to all hearers indiscriminately, and this offer is the warrant for the sinner to come to Christ. Isa. 45:22; 55:1; Ezek. 33:11; Mat. 11:28; John 3:16; Rom. 10:21; Rev. 22:17
- d. Both the Law and the Gospel should be preached in its strictness and fullness. Isa. 40:9; Rom. 11:33-36; Gal. 3:10
- e. The preaching should aim for the maturation of God's people, equipping them to fight the good fight of faith, to grow in holiness, to intensify the mortification of the flesh, to abound in good works and to make them heavenly minded. Eph. 4; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 3:17; Gal. 4:19; Heb. 12:4; 2 Cor. 5:2; Col. 1:9-12; 2 Peter 3:18

7. REGENERATION

- a. Regeneration is a sovereign act of God in which the sinner is passive. Ezek. 16:6; John 3:3-9
- b. In regeneration, a new principle of life is granted to the dead sinner, making him spiritually alive to God in the mind, will, and affections. John 17:2,3; 1 John 2:29,3:14
- c. God's normal way of regenerating His elect is by means of His Word applied by His Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Thes. 2:13; Rom. 10:14
- d. Regeneration expresses itself in a sorrow after God (resulting from a love to God and a conviction of one's sinfulness), leading to repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a holy walk in the Spirit. Jer. 24:7; John 1:12,13; Ezek. 36:26-31

8. JUSTIFICATION

- a. Justification is based solely on the imputation (not impartation) of the righteousness of Christ, which is received in the way of true faith, when first exercised. Luke 7:47-50; Rom. 4:5,6; 5; Gal. 3:11,24
- b. As the sin of Adam was imputed to all his posterity, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the elect, their sin having been imputed unto Him, as the second Adam and Head of His Church. Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18
- c. Justification is a one-time act of God declaring the sinner righteous, entitling him to eternal life. John 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 8:1,33

9. CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

- a. Christ's atonement merited for the elect the propitiation of God's wrath and the expiation of their sins. Rom. 3:25; Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:20-22; 1 John 4:10

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- Having an MA in leadership or equivalent training is considered an asset.
- Having Alberta School Leadership Certification (LQS) or ability to obtain it.

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- Detailed job descriptions can be found at pcsmonarch.com
- Inquiries and/or applications can be forwarded to Mr. Kevin Slomp, Board President - recruitment@pcsmonarch.com
- For other inquiries check out our website or contact the principal, Mr. Hugo VanderHoek, principal@pcsmonarch.com , 403-381-4418

FREE REFORMED SYNOD 2023

Synod 2023 is scheduled to be held **June 5-8, 2023, DV, in the St. George Free Reformed Church building.**

As the calling church for Synod 2023, we request that submissions be sent to erin@salemastudios.ca *no later than April 14, 2023.* Submissions are to be sent in Microsoft Word format (.docx) or Microsoft Excel format (.xlsx) for financial reports.

The Calgary Free Reformed Consistory

- b. The atonement is sufficient for all, while effective only for the elect. John 3:16; Rom. 11:15; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 1 John 2:2
- c. Scripture teaches that there is a general grace, enabling civil and common good, as well as a general work of the Spirit, producing a form of godliness, but neither of these ought to be confused with God's saving grace and the Holy Spirit's special work. Mat. 5:45; 1 Tim. 2:1,2; Heb. 6:1-6

10. SANCTIFICATION

- a. True Christians are called to live a life of thankfulness, which expresses itself in a life of faith, self-denial, humility, sobriety, honesty, modesty, and diligence. Gal. 5:22, 23; Eph. 5,6; 2 Peter 3:11
- b. Good works are a fruit of saving grace but are not the ground of acceptance with God.
- c. God's people are sanctified in Christ, their complete redemption. 1 Cor. 1:30
- d. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. 2 Thes. 2:13
- e. Sanctification is a process, which reaches its perfection in glory.
- f. Sin remains in the believer against his will until death. Rom. 7; Phil. 3:13,14;

11. GOD'S LAW

- a. God's law functions as a schoolmaster to Christ and as a rule of life. Mat. 28:20; Gal. 3:24; 1 John 5:3
- b. The believer is free from the curse and penalty of the law. Gal. 5:1
- c. The Lord's Day has replaced the Old Testament Sabbath Day and ought to be observed with sobriety, diligence, and joy. We should rest from all daily tasks except from works of necessity and charity. Ex. 20:8- 11; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10

12. WORSHIP

- a. We hold to the importance of maintaining the Biblical simplicity of worship, in which the preaching is central. 1 Cor. 14:26,40
- b. Scripture mandates the singing of Psalms in the worship services. Eph. 5:19
- c. Families are to be encouraged to conduct family worship on a regular basis.
- d. The Authorized Version (KJV), which we use, is a trustworthy translation.

13. OFFICES

- a. God appointed men only to be office-bearers in the church: elders and deacons. 1 Cor. 14:34 b. There are two kinds of elders: a teaching and a ruling elder. Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17

14. REVIVALS

- a. Revivals are sovereign acts of God, wherein He enlivens His people resulting in a much greater degree of love, holiness, and zeal. 1 Sam. 7:1-6; Isa. 32:15; Micah 4:1-8; Zech. 8:20-23 b. Revivals result in the conversion of many sinners. Acts 2:41,47
- c. True revivals generate much social good in the community.
- d. Churches ought to pray for the reviving work of the Holy Spirit, while being encouraged by God's more gradual work in His Church. Isa. 64:1; Hab. 3:2

15. MISSION & EVANGELISM

- a. Churches should be active in missionary and evangelistic endeavors. Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47
- b. In carrying out these activities, the Church should ensure that its methods are scriptural.

16. UNITY

- a. Churches are to seek unity with other faithful churches, since Christ's body, the Church, is one. Ps. 133: 1; John 10:16; 17:22; Acts 4:32; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 1:27
- b. Church unions must take place on the basis of God's infallible truth, not only as confessed (in our Reformed Creeds), but also practiced by its members.

17. RETURN OF CHRIST

- a. Christ shall return to earth physically to judge the living and the dead. Mat. 16:27; 26:64; Acts 1:11; 17:31; 1 Thes. 4:16,17; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 22:12
- b. He shall return once, on the last day. Heb. 9:27,28; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 1:7
- c. This return of Christ shall usher in eternal bliss for God's people and a never-ending damnation of the unbelieving and unrepentant sinner. Matt. 25:31-46

Listening to What is Not Said (2)

Last time I showed that listening to what is not said is an important exercise of discernment for everyone and elders in particular. This time I will focus on regular church members who come under the preaching of the Word in order to hear what God proclaims. I hope that you come under the Word with a prayerful longing for God's saving grace and to meet God through His Word.

Aquila and Priscilla

Acts 18 recounts a church service in Ephesus. A new preacher had come, whom they had never heard. He was from Alexandria, and, on his way through, he stopped at Ephesus. The church council of Ephesus had heard favourable reports about him and had nothing against him preaching for the church. As a result, Apollos ministered the Word in Ephesus.

His teaching made a deep impression. His whole demeanor, use of language, and examples testified to great gifts of eloquence. He captivated them from beginning to end. What fervour and what fresh insights! Everything made a deep impression. People left the service very impressed!

Among Apollos' audience were two people who were also impressed. They too respected this preacher and his message. But when Aquila and his wife Priscilla returned home from the synagogue and discussed what they heard, one may have said to the other: "I appreciated a lot, but didn't you miss something too? Does he not lack some insight in 'the way of the Lord'?" Aquila and his wife listened to what was said, but they also noticed things that were not said.

Aquila and Priscilla then sought contact with Apollos. They kindly asked if they could speak to him. When he gave them the opportunity to do so, they told him what they missed in his message. Apollos did not intentionally cover those things in silence and willfully hide them. He did not know better. His knowledge was still limited, and he gladly let himself be further instructed. He did not consider it beneath his dignity to listen to these two people, even though they were just regular church members. On the contrary, this meeting was a great blessing for Apollos and further qualified him for his task in Christ's church.

Apart from the way in which Aquila and Priscilla further taught Apollos and that they did not write this man off based on one sermon, it is clear that under the preaching of Apollos they listened both to what was said and what was not said. Thankfully, ignorance of certain truths is what kept Apollos from teaching certain matters, not aversion to truths he knew. The latter would have been much worse. But that it was ignorance and not unwillingness became apparent only during his conversation with Aquila

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and Priscilla. But is ignorance always the reason certain truths are not preached? We cannot assume that.

Salvation by Grace Alone

Well, let's take a closer look at those things that are in danger of being ignored in preaching. There are things which we would rather not hear and therefore would rather not say. After all, the Gospel contains elements that do not suit our natural taste and are "not according to man." What things are they?

We can think of the fact that man is dead in trespasses and sins and therefore completely incapable of any good and inclined to all evil. The truth that flows from this reality is that every person without exception must be born again, regardless of whether or not they belong to the covenant of grace. We can think of the sovereignty of God, who does with His creatures what pleases Him. This sovereignty is expressed particularly in God being the God of election, who freely elects some and does not elect others. We can also think of the aspect that God justifies the ungodly and not the pious. In short, the Gospel repeatedly and with great emphasis proclaims that only God's grace can save us. Only God's undeserved favour to the unworthy saves.

Is this not what is called the offence of the Gospel? Is this not what Paul means when he writes in Galatians 1:11 that the Gospel proclaimed by Him is not according to man? Wasn't this also the reason why many people stopped walking with the Lord Jesus because his sayings were "hard" (John 6:60,66)? When they came to understand that only sovereign grace can save, they no longer had any interest in Jesus' words.

This resistance to this message puts pressure on the messengers of the gospel to gloss over certain aspects of the gospel, or at least fail to give them the weight that Scripture gives them. At these points, preaching often goes awry and the Word of truth is not rightly divided. This is detrimental to the spiritual life of the congregation. Over a number of years, a congregation becomes ignorant of important aspects of the message which God has revealed in His Word. Not only do people become ignorant of them, but also begin to be irritated when these aspects are expounded on occasion. Let us look at a few of these aspects in more detail.

The Decree of Election

God is sovereign. The Bible leaves no room for doubt about that. That sovereignty is expressed as God's rule and control of all things and events. But while people may be willing to acknowledge that the Lord is sovereign in world events, they run into problems when they hear that God is also sovereign in granting grace to some and withholding it from others. They become uncomfortable when they read of God granting grace only due to His own good pleasure and not anything any recipient of grace has ever done or been. Do I have nothing to contribute at all? Does nothing of who I am come into consideration? These thoughts are unbearable. So, resistance to these teachings rises because they do not suit his pride.



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PASTOR BART CARLSON GRADUATED FROM TRINITY MINISTERIAL ACADEMY IN 1992. AFTER A BRIEF TIME ASSISTING CHURCHES IN THE PHILIPPINES HE BECAME AN ELDER AT TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH OF MONTVILLE, NJ IN 1995 AND SINCE THEN HAS SERVED THE CHURCH IN FULL-TIME PREACHING, TEACHING AND PASTORAL DUTIES.



PASTOR SAM PEREZ IS A NATIVE OF SPANISH HARLEM. HE WORKED AS A SCHOOL TEACHER IN THE SOUTH BRONX AND BROOKLYN BEFORE GRADUATING WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY. HE NOW PASTORS GRACE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH IN JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY.

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PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Sometimes attempts are made to find a solution that both does justice to what the Bible says about God's sovereignty and leaves room for something of man. Such teaching recognizes God does elect, but that this election is nevertheless related to man's efforts. Others let the recognition of God's sovereignty in election and reprobation be paired with an apparent submission which is only a cover for and excuse to secretly blame God for unbelief.

The resistance evoked by the doctrine of God's election easily leads the preacher to remain silent about it. He does not want to antagonize his hearers. Perhaps he himself even has the same difficulties with these things as his congregation does. As a result, the people hardly hear about this doctrine. But then preacher and hearers fail to realize that in this way the gospel message becomes incomplete, and justice is not done to the gracious character of salvation. Preachers can then no longer say what Paul said to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:26-27): "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." How can they then confess with Paul: "I am pure from the blood of all men"? What a solemn thought that is!

If an honest hearer must confess, "I hear nothing of God's electing good pleasure," there is reason to fear. An important element of God's glory is withheld from Him and an amazing element of the doctrine of salvation is withheld from the congregation.

God's gracious election is more than once kept silent in preaching. The subject is too difficult, and it is too humbling to man with his sense of "worthiness." It throws him back on grace and grace alone, and that is something with which we do not agree naturally. We need to be won over to that truth.

Man's Depravity

If we ignore God's sovereign grace in salvation, we will also ignore and resist other truths, including man's radical depravity.

The religion preached to us in the Bible is a sinner's religion. It begins with the reality that man is a fallen creature incapable of any good and prone to all evil. This is how the Heidelberg Catechism describes the condition of everyone by nature.

This confession is based squarely on Scripture. Think of Genesis 6:5, for example: "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Such words leave no doubt about our corruption. Neither does a text like Genesis 8:21: "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." In Mark 7:21-23, the Lord Jesus is unmistakable: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications,

If we ignore God's sovereign grace in salvation, we will also ignore and resist other truths, including man's radical depravity.

murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.” Many more scriptures present us with the same painful reality. Man is not virtuous at all. He is so in the grip and under the power of sin that he can rightly be called a slave of sin.

This message is indeed very humbling, especially at a time when such emphasis is placed on human rights and self-empowerment. No wonder man rebels against such a message. His honour is tarnished. His sense of dignity is injured. Do I have to agree with this divine judgment? Must I learn to bow so deeply before God as such a sinner?

What about the good qualities that people must surely have? What if he does his best to live decently and give everyone their due? What if he is also religious, believes the Bible, and tries to walk in the Lord’s ways? Don’t these things make some people better than others? I don’t have to believe there is nothing good in me, do I? It’s not that bad, is it? No, the message of man’s total depravity does not make the Bible message popular.

This resistance is not new. When God sent His prophets to Israel to remind His people of their sins and call them to a break with sin, that message was too crushing, and people turned from it. They wanted prophets to speak smooth and soft things. They thought the prophets should recognize that there was some good to be said of man. That same innate aversion to sharp, convicting preaching has remained to the present day.

Consequently, some preaching has taken a different tack than the prophets did. It does not expose the painful truth of our depravity. If it mentions our sin, it is vague and veiled. The sword of the word is blunted, and people are not pained or stirred to anger by it. In listening to this preaching, we must be alarmed that important things are not said in it.

By not proclaiming these things, the congregation is not dealt with honestly. In the effort to avoid annoying or offending anyone, preachers do not confront their congregations with the reality of their sin, and people get the impression that sin is not so bad.

No wonder that such preaching promotes superficiality. Without a clear view of themselves, people never get a clear view of the death of the Lord Jesus and their “faith” remains superficial. They are not filled with amazement that God looks upon lost and depraved sinners with grace in Christ. We have to conclude that when our depravity is minimized, the gracious character of salvation remains hidden as well. That makes listening to what is not said so important. M

Rev. P. den Butter is an emeritus pastor in our sister churches in the Netherlands. He served the Free Reformed churches of Toronto (1975-1978) and Hamilton (1978-1982). This series is a condensed version of articles published as “Luisteren naar wat niet gezegd wordt” in Bewaar het Pand (2002).

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An Open Door for Bible Education: MUKHANYO'S PRESENT OPPORTUNITY



South Africa is often called a microcosm: the whole world in one country. This is the case, not only due to the country's resources, its many languages and cultures, and the variety in its natural beauty, but also due to its problems and challenges. This is also the case in respect of the dire need for honest Bible knowledge and Christian witness.

On the one hand, there are many hundreds of denominations and independent churches who claim to be *Christian*. About 80% of approximately 60 million people say they are Christians. On the other hand, the vast majority of these so-called *churches* cannot be classified as true churches according to the Belgic Confession of Faith's marks of the true church.

Great Need and Great Opportunity

This reality is great a challenge, but also an opportunity for Mukhanyo Theological College. Many people who claim to be



Christians urgently need to be taught that Christ said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21), and, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

It is common knowledge that most of such churches are led by a man who has very little Bible training. Yet he opens the Bible each week, quotes a text – the Old Testament is especially popular – and weaves a self-contrived story around it. It may impress people. But he does not preach the Word and God is not pleased.

The general lack of knowledge about Biblical facts and teaching has worsened in the past few decades, since the authorities have forbidden public schools to teach the Bible, as was standard practice in previous years. The result is that even those who identify as Christian know very little about the Bible, except popular slogans like "Jesus loves you."

For example, some students who applied recently for study at a local Christian academy were asked to name the main author of the Psalms: Moses, David, or Frederick the Pious. Sadly, the majority chose Frederick. Likewise, Mukhanyo lecturers can testify that many students, including ones who apply for higher-level theological study, have very limited knowledge about the Bible's storyline and main doctrines.

This is where colleges like Mukhanyo have an open door to

make a huge difference. Mukhanyo offers a range of theological qualifications, at various academic levels, for all who want to know more about Christ and follow Him. Most Mukhanyo students have a calling to serve in church leadership, or desire to work in other forms of Christian ministry. More than a thousand students are presently studying at Mukhanyo's five campuses and 95 local learning sites.

Open Doors for Reformed Education

How long will the doors of opportunity remain open for Mukhanyo to continue this important educational ministry? Mukhanyo has served for almost thirty years. By God's grace, the college continues to expand to serve more students from more churches in more areas of Southern Africa. Upon an unchanged scriptural and confessional foundation, the college continues to provide quality Reformed theological education for churches in Africa.

The college is blessed with a gifted team of people in all areas: a faithful Board of Directors, an experienced Executive Team, various senior lecturers at each campus, and a whole team of various support staff. The college is also thankful for stable donors – both local and international – who cover operational costs, subsidize tuition fees for needy students, and ensure the doors stay open, hopefully for many years.

The political and social environment, at present, also allows the doors to remain open for Mukhanyo to continue its ministry. For example, South Africa's Constitution of 1996, which claims to be the most progressive in the world, includes a bill of rights that guarantees freedom of religion, belief and opinion, and enshrines the right to practice religion and join a church.

Christian missionaries and evangelists can freely preach the gospel, plant churches, train church leaders, and establish private Christian schools. Regular church services are held without hindrance, though churches must be registered with the government for tax purposes. Furthermore, Christian culture is generally accepted, unlike many other countries in the world. Although religion may not be taught in public schools, some schools still find ways to bypass this policy, and the authorities have not stopped them yet.

Concerning Trends in South Africa

However, the worldwide trend against Christianity also has in-



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fluence on religious freedom in South Africa. There are some signs in that direction, such as the following:

- Draft legislation, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Amendment Bill, may make life for true churches difficult. Unfair discrimination, the so-called hate speech, could easily be weaponized against faithful preaching. Even if this bill does not become law – thankfully, there are many objections – it reveals the direction of the government’s thinking.
- Existing legislation already makes it possible for a Hindu or a Muslim, claiming *hate speech*, to sue a Christian pastor who preaches these religions are unbiblical. Also, recently a same-sex couple took a wedding venue to court because the owner did not allow such a marriage to take place at his venue.



- The majority of Members of Parliament claim to be Christian, but they argue their faith is a private matter separate from their legislative work. They do not realize that operating from a non-Christian value system will result in non-Christian decisions and policies.

- Christian ethics in South Africa are very shallow. For example, although most churches are strongly opposed to the right of women to have abortions, both “legal” and illegal abortions are common, killing an estimated 260,000 unborn babies each year. There is also a strong movement to decriminalize prostitution and to promote the LGBTQ worldview in schools.

Yes, South Africa has religious freedom. But the country is quickly becoming post-Christian, and the government may eventually follow Europe in becoming anti-Christian. Truly, South Africa is a “microcosm” of the world in many ways. Thus, it is likely that Christianity will soon come under pressure here as well.

Our Present Gospel Opportunity

Will the door of opportunity remain open for Mukhanyo to continue its educational ministry in South Africa? Probably, at least for the next decade. Only God knows, and we can trust Him in everything. We need not fear the future, but neither should we be surprised if the present doors of opportunity start to close.

By God’s grace, Mukhanyo has an open door for ministry now, so we continue to serve as many students as reasonably possible. Mukhanyo’s leadership, aware of what may be coming, has also taken steps to enshrine its Biblical values and to strengthen its structures and strategies to prepare for possible opposition.

The great need for Bible education in Africa is not decreasing. In fact, the challenging social and political environments add to its

importance. These present realities in South Africa increase the urgency of the task of Reformed theological education. Faithfully equipping church and ministry leaders according to God’s Word remains, more than ever, a high priority in South Africa. ①

Mr. Rob Van der Kooy works at Mukhanyo Theological College in South Africa; Dr. Brian DeVries is the principal of Mukhanyo Theological College and a Heritage Reformed missionary. Free Reformed Missions International provides support for Mukhanyo Theological College.

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